



Þjalar-Jóns saga

A Translation and Introduction

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Þjalar-Jóns saga

Philip Lavender¹

Introduction and Genre

Þjalar-Jóns saga is an entertaining tale, written in Iceland, suffering from something of an identity crisis. This introduction to the saga contains spoilers as regards its plot. Some may prefer to read the translation first and treat the introduction as an afterword.

There is one medieval manuscript of the saga (on which see below), dated to around 1400, and other than this we know very little about its early history. Stefán Einarsson claimed that it was written at Reykhólar on Breiðafjörður, but provides no rationale for such an identification.² He had also claimed at an earlier date that

the Icelandic *lygi sögur* derive both from the Norwegian school of Abbot Robert's translated romances and from the native *fornaldar sögur* from the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The strand of the genre which derives from the *fornaldar sögur* is easily discernible from the first to the last. Here belong, in the period 1300–50, *Vilmundar saga víðútan*, *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, *Hrings saga ok Tryggva*, and *Sigurðar saga fóts*; in the period 1400–1500, *Álaflekks saga*, *Sigurgarðs saga frækna*, *Valdimars saga*, and *Jóns saga leiksveins*. The influence of chivalrous romance on these sagas is slight for their chief characteristics are native motifs and native style.³

Thus we are apparently dealing with a *lygisaga* ('lying saga'), written between 1300 and 1350, which displays little influence from translated Old Norse romances, themselves particularly associated with the court of Hákon Hákonarsson of Norway (r. 1217–63). The somewhat pejorative term *lygisaga*, extremely sporadically attested in medieval writings, is not widely used today, having been dropped in preference of *native*, *original* or *indigenous riddarasögur*. If we accept the latter term then it is clear that *Þjalar-Jóns saga* has been considered to tend more to the 'indigenous' end of the scale than the *riddarasaga* end, an opinion also held by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, who said that its style 'has little in common with that of the romances, and as regards its matter it may with as much justification be called a Heroic saga as a romance'.⁴

¹ I wish to thank the anonymous peer-reviewers whose feedback has greatly improved this translation and the introduction. Any errors that remain are, however, purely my own.

² Stefán Einarsson, 'Heimili (skólar) fornaldarsagna og riddarasagna', *Skírnir*, 140 (1966), 272.

³ Stefán Einarsson, *A History of Icelandic Literature* (New York: John Hopkins Press, 1957), pp. 163–64.

⁴ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Viktors saga ok Blávus: Sources and Characteristics', in *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, ed. by Jónas

In spite of these statements, however, *Þjalar-Jóns saga* has never been included in any of the collected editions of the *fornaldarsögur*, such as Rafn's (1829–30) or Bjarni Vilhjálmsson and Guðni Jónsson's (1943–44).⁵ Yet having not made the cut for the latter collection, it is also notably absent from Bjarni Vilhjálmsson's collection of *riddarasögur* (1963). He explains in the overall introduction to that collected edition, referring to the various volumes, that 'er þeim ætlað að vera sýnishorn' ('they are intended to be a selection'), yet two of the other *fornaldarsaga*-style sagas mentioned by Stefán Einarsson are included.⁶ *Þjalar-Jóns saga* could be said to take place prior to the settlement of Iceland (it is hard to tell since other than a 'viking' ethos, there is little overtly historical detail to grasp on to), but it definitely does not take place in Scandinavia, a requisite for inclusion among the *fornaldarsögur*.⁷ Rather, the focus of action is northern France and Russia, both areas which, while not Scandinavian *per se*, did see intense settlement from Scandinavia in the early medieval period.⁸ The Mediterranean, African and Asian climes which are so common in other indigenous *riddarasögur* remain on the periphery, as do Saracen threats, learned and fiercely defensive maiden-kings, and extended motifs adopted from the works of Chrétien de Troyes.⁹ It is only relatively recently that certain scholars have fished this saga out of the gap to which it had been consigned and taken a decisive decision on its generic status. Marianne E. Kalinke and P. M. Mitchell included it in their *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*.¹⁰ Conversely, the 'Stories for All Time: The Icelandic Fornaldarsögur' website and online bibliography include the saga among its legendary pre-Icelandic settlement texts.¹¹ It remains to be seen whether either of the designations will stick.

Sources and Motifs

The ostracism which *Þjalar-Jóns saga* has been subjected to has mostly been expressed in negative terms: what the saga does not contain. But there is a great deal that the saga does contain which can nuance our approach to it. In brief, the saga tells of Eiríkur, a prince in France, who becomes the companion of a mysterious stranger named Gestur. This stranger

Kristjánsson, *Riddarasögur*, 2 (Reykjavík: Handritastofnun Íslands, 1964), pp. cix–ccxii (p. cxxxiii).

⁵ *Fornaldar sögur Nordurlanda*, ed. by Carl Christian Rafn, 3 vols (Copenhagen: Popp, 1829–30); *Fornaldarsögur Nordurlanda*, ed. by Bjarni Vilhjálmsson and Guðni Jónsson, 3 vols (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1943–44).

⁶ Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 'Formáli' in *Riddarasögur*, ed. by Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 7 vols (Haukadalur: Íslendingasagnauðgáfan, 1963), I, xvii. Incidentally, 9 of the 11 sagas in the oldest manuscript containing *Þjalar Jóns saga* are included in Bjarni Vilhjálmsson's collection. The *fornaldarsaga*-style sagas which are also present are *Vilmundar saga víðutan* and *Sigurðar saga fífs*. These, along with *Hrings saga ok Tryggva*, although not *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, make it into *Late Medieval Romances*, ed. by Agnete Loth, Editiones Arnemagaeanae, series B, 20–24, 5 vols (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962–65).

⁷ On these requisites see Philip Lavender, 'The Secret Prehistory of the *Fornaldarsögur*', *JEGP*, 114 (2015), 526–51 (p. 535).

⁸ Horst Zettel, 'France, Norse in' and Haakon Stang, 'Russia, Norse in', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 219–20 and 556–58 respectively.

⁹ On these genre features see, for example, Jürg Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas: Studien zur Prosaliteratur im spätmittelalterlichen Island*, Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie, 12 (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1983); Marianne E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, *Islandica*, 46 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Marianne E. Kalinke and P. M. Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, *Islandica*, 44 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 132–34. Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas*, pp. 315–17, also includes the saga under the genre alluded to in the title of the work.

¹¹ Compiled principally by Matthew Driscoll and Silvia Hufnagel (<http://fasn1.ku.dk>).

turns out to be the eponymous Jón, a wondrously skilled craftsman and engineer, who has been ousted from his homeland after his father, the king, was defeated and killed by the usurper Roðbert. Together they travel to Jón's homeland where, through deception, ingenuity and prowess on the battlefield, they recuperate the lost patrimony. The saga ends with both men getting married to the women of their choice and having their kingdoms consolidated.

A clear link to the *fornaldarsögur* can be found in chapters 12 and 13, when in a flashback the young Jón, sentenced to death by the evil Roðbert, is left locked in some stocks in a dangerously exposed area outside of the fortress walls. When night falls and Jón is attacked by a monstrous she-wolf, he is able to save himself. He does so thanks to his mother, who has managed to send her maid to him with a knife and honey, the latter of which, smeared on his face and in his mouth, tricks the she-wolf into poking her tongue between his teeth so that he can bite down on it and restrain her while he attacks. The scene should be instantly recognisable to anyone familiar with *Völsunga saga*. It is reproduced in full here:

Signy learned that her father had been killed and her brothers taken prisoner and sentenced to death. She calls King Siggeir aside and said, 'I want to ask you not to have my brothers executed so swiftly, but have them put in stocks instead, for the old saying "happy the eye that gazes its fill" expresses my feelings well. I won't ask for a longer stay of execution for them, for I expect that my request would fall on deaf ears.'

Siggeir replies, 'You must be completely out of your mind. You ask for worse treatment than beheading for your brothers. But your wish shall be granted. The greater their suffering before they die, the better I like it.'

He now gives orders to do as she asked. A huge pair of stocks were fastened over the legs of the ten brothers somewhere out in the forest. They are left sitting there all that day and into the night. But in the middle of the night an old she-wolf came to them out of the forest as they sat trapped in the stocks. This large and ferocious-looking beast bites one of them to death, devoured the entire body, and then made off.

In the morning Signy sent the man she trusted most to her brothers to find out how they were. Upon returning, he tells her that one of them is dead. It grieved her to think that the same might happen to all the others, but she was at a loss for a way to help them.

To make a long story short, the same she-wolf came at midnight nine nights in a row, killing and eating one of the brothers each night until only Sigmund remains alive. But before the tenth night arrives, Signy sends her trusted messenger to her brother Sigmund. She gave the man some honey and instructed him to smear it on Sigmund's face, putting some of it into his mouth. The messenger now goes to Sigmund, does as he was told, and then returned home.

During the following night, the she-wolf comes as usual. She intended to bite Sigmund to death as she had done to his brothers, but she catches the scent of the honey that had been smeared on him; she licked his face all over and then sticks her tongue into his mouth. Afraid of nothing, he bit into the wolf's tongue. She gives a violent start and pulls back, pressing so hard with her paws against the stocks that they split apart. Sigmund held on so tightly with his teeth that the she-wolf's tongue was torn out by the roots, leaving her dead. Some say that this beast was the mother of King Siggeir and that she resorted to foul witchcraft to take on this guise.¹²

Völsunga saga is generally believed to date to the thirteenth century, so it would seem more likely that the borrowing is into *Bjalar-Jóns saga*, and not in the reverse direction. There are

¹² *Völsunga saga* — *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Icelandic Text According to MS Nks 1824 b, 4o*, ed. and trans.

two further reasons to believe this is the case. The first is *Völsunga saga*'s repeated references to wolves and lycanthropy, as a result of which the she-wolf's attack fits fairly seamlessly in, as opposed to in *Þjalar-Jóns saga* where it is a somewhat unconnected anomaly. The second is the slightly clunky use of the motif in *Þjalar-Jóns saga*. The whole point of the honey is to enable Sigmund to maim the she-wolf without access to a weapon, but in *Þjalar-Jóns saga* he has a knife as well, making the honey more or less superfluous.

Nevertheless, the scene as it stands serves to emphasise Jón's prowess. He is no ordinary man, but a prodigious hero, capable of taking down fearsome monsters. Grimstad suggests that Sigmund's ripping out of the she-wolf's tongue in *Völsunga saga* is 'a feat evocative of the mythological slaying of Fenrir' (p. 33), and this idea of a divine pagan overlay could be extended to *Þjalar-Jóns saga*. Jón first turns up disguised as Gestur, a popular Odinic pseudonym in Old Norse tales, and one of his superlative possessions is the self-replicating ring, Gáinn, a parallel to Óðinn's Draupnir.¹³ He is in many ways a legendary hero of a kind with Örvar-Oddur and Göngu-Hrólfr.¹⁴

Despite these heroic and mythic overtones, an even more thoroughgoing connection can be seen with one of the *riddarasögur*. As noted by Jürg Glauser, there is a clear connection between *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* and *Þjalar-Jóns saga*.¹⁵ The argument in favour of this special relationship is bolstered by the codicological evidence of them being 'frequent friends'. Of the many manuscripts containing *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, 13 contain the two sagas in immediate succession and there are a further 5 in which the two appear non-consecutively. Such a close pairing is a fairly rare occurrence.

Konráðs saga keisarasonar tells the story of Konráður, the prince of the Land of the Saxons, and his sworn brother Roðbert.¹⁶ They travel to Miklagarður (Constantinople), where Konráður's inability to speak the language puts him at the mercy of Roðbert, who turns out to be a treacherous scoundrel. Roðbert's machinations (he pretends that he is the prince and Konráður his servant) put Konráður in danger and come close to preventing him from achieving his goal, marriage to the beautiful and wise princess Mathilda. Luckily Mathilda is also a polyglot and manages to communicate with Konráður and expose Roðbert's treachery. Surprisingly, considering the genre, Roðbert does not get his comeuppance and die at the end of the saga, but lives to fight another day. It is this Roðbert who seems to be the main antagonist of *Þjalar-Jóns saga*. That this is not just a coincidence or an example of conventional naming patterns for villains is borne out by the details of the saga: when Roðbert is introduced in chapter VII he is said to be 'svo fróður at hann talar allar tungur' ('so wise that he speaks all languages'), and at the end of the saga Jón and Eiríkur visit Konráður as part of the celebratory parade around Europe.¹⁷

Early audiences seem to have been well aware of these intertextual strands. Árni Magnússon (1663–1730), for example, on f. 21r of AM 576 b 4to discusses how the two

by Karen Grimstad, *Bibliotheca Germanica Series Nova*, 3 (Saarbrücken: AQ-Verlag, 2000), pp. 89, 91.

¹³ See Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. by Angela Hall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), pp. 65–66.

¹⁴ *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson, 4 vols (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954), II, 199–363 (*Örvar-Odds saga*); III, 161–280 (*Göngu-Hrólfs saga*).

¹⁵ Jürg Glauser, 'Þjalar-Jóns saga', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 664–65. On this connection, see also Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 179–85.

¹⁶ Otto J. Zitzelsberger, *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*, *American University Studies, Series I: Germanic Languages and Literature*, 63 (New York: Lang, 1987).

¹⁷ *Þjalar-Jóns saga; Dámusta saga*, ed. by Louisa Fredrika Tan-Haverhorst (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon,

sagas in question share one and the same villain. At the start of the twentieth century (1902) a postscript to *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* on pp. 64–65 in Lbs 2497 8vo expresses in similar terms the character interaction even beyond the two named sagas:

Eins og endir þessarrar sögu ber með sér, þá er hún inngangr að Konráðssögu Keisarasonar, er fór til Ormalands. En framhald Konráðssögu er Þjalar-Jóns saga, því Roðbert sonarsonur Jallmanns er [...] Konráð mat það meira er hann lagði eigi þyngdi refsingu á hann fyrir svík hans, en hann gerði. Þessar 3 sögur eru því eiginlega ein sögu að vissu leiti: 1. Hermanns og Jallmanns, 2. Konráðs keisarasonar og Roðbert svíkara, 3. Þjalar-Jóns og Eiríks forvitna.

(Just as is implied by the end of this saga, it is an introduction to the saga of Konráður keisarason, who travelled to the country of serpents. And the continuation of *Konráðs saga* is *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, since Roðbert is the grandson of Jarlmann [...] Konráður considered that to be important when he did not punish Roðbert more severely than he did for his deception. These three sagas are thus in some way a single saga: 1. *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*, 2. *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*, 3. *Þjalar-Jóns saga ok Eiríks forvitna*.)¹⁸

Not only do we follow different generations of the same families through these three sagas, but similar concerns also arise time and again. Trust and treachery are key concerns: Jarlmann does not trust Hermann in his saga, but apparently without justification; Konráður trusts Roðbert in his saga, but certainly should not; Jón and Eiríkur start off uncertainly in *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, but following on from this tentative beginning come to be something of a dream team and can use their solid relationship to challenge the suspicious and deceitful Roðbert and ultimately defeat him. Two personality traits which are also emphasised and interact with the already-mentioned themes are curiosity and ingenuity. Geraldine Barnes has recently shown how in *indigenous riddarasögur* the misapplication of curiosity (or *forvitni*) can have just as negative effects as the appropriate use of it can have positive ones.¹⁹ Jarlmann in *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* is not curious enough about the *kuflungar*, and Konráður in *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* should have been a bit more curious about what Roðbert was saying. Yet curiosity can also get one involved in tricky situations, as is the case when Eiríkur incessantly questions Gestur/Jón (compare also Barnes' example of Dínus drambláti). This risky trait is ultimately counterbalanced, however, by Gestur's boundless ingenuity.

If there is one thing which really sets *Þjalar-Jóns saga* apart from its peers, it is the way the tale revels in architectural complexity and artesanal ingenuity (the title itself and Jón's cognomen refer to the *þél* or 'file', a great tool used by a great craftsman). From the construction of a road across an impenetrable plateau (unparalleled in medieval Icelandic literature) to the detailed description of underground tunnels into hidden cellars or Roðbert's fortifications, the text shows an extreme sensitivity to topography and manmade interventions

1939), p. 12 (normalised). Hereafter just ÞJs.

¹⁸ Paul Bibire has also commented on the connection between *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* and *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*: 'As mentioned above, there are clear, intentional and explicit relationships between *Clari saga* and *Nítida saga*, and between *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* and *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*. In both cases, the second saga takes the same situation and examines it from an opposed viewpoint, as if to provide a commentary upon the first saga': Paul Bibire, 'From *Riddarasaga* to *Lygisaga*: The Norse Response to Romance', in *Les Sagas de Chevaliers (Riddarasögur): Actes de la Ve Conférence Internationale sur les Sagas Présentées par Régis Boyer (Toulon. Juillet 1982)*, ed. by Régis Boyer, Serie Civilisations, 10 (Toulon: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 1985), pp. 55–74 (p. 70).

¹⁹ Geraldine Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur: Writing Romance in Late Medieval Iceland* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2014), p. 58.

upon it. In this sense it bears comparison with yet another saga, namely the ‘post-classical’ *Íslendingasaga*, *Króka-Refs saga*.

Króka-Refur is characterised by his ingenuity, and in one of the most memorable scenes of the saga his wilderness fortress in Greenland is besieged. An attempt is made to burn the structure down, but this fails due to Refur’s having constructed a system of hydraulics which pumps water through pipes and into the walls which are being assailed. A Norwegian merchant named Barður gets involved and receives advice from King Haraldur Sigurðarson in Norway, who tells him to find and block off the pipes. Once Barður has helped to incapacitate the defences, the next wondrous event occurs when one of the fortress walls comes tumbling down, and out rolls a ship on wheels. With Refur and company aboard it hurtles down to the water and sails away:

fellr sa virkislutrinn, er fram horfde at síónum; þar var svo gegnt til ætlad, at virkid fell i skurdinn á framan-verdenn sævarbackann; það var suo slétt sem ein fiol. Enn i þui er virkid fell, rann þar epter fram skip á hælum og þegar fram á síóinn. Þeir Refr draga þegar segl vpp.²⁰

(That section of the fortress which faced the sea fell down. It was made with a plan in mind, so that the section fell into the trench pointing out down the beach to the sea. It was as smooth as a plank. And as soon as the fortress wall fell, a ship on wheels rolled out and immediately down towards the sea. Refur and his people raise the sails.)

The similarities with chapters 17–19 of *Þjalar-Jóns saga* are clear (and all the more so since comparable features appear nowhere else in Old Norse literature): a hydraulic system used to control the flow of water into a confined space and a dramatic exit from said confined space on a wheeled ship through a collapsing wall. The specificity of these features makes them almost certainly related, and yet the differences are also significant. In *Króka-Refs saga* the hydraulic system is put in place as a defence against attacks made with fire; in *Þjalar-Jóns saga* it appears mostly to be employed as a weapon (neither Röðbert nor his men are even aware that there is anything going on inside the mountain). The water dammed up by Jón does not put out a fire, but is an army-flattening deluge.

Based on the dating of the two sagas, it is reasonable to assume that *Þjalar-Jóns saga* borrowed the motif from *Króka-Refs saga*. Moreover, the content of the sagas backs up such a conclusion. The details of these contraptions are highly reminiscent of various accounts of Continental siege warfare, and it is only in *Króka-Refs saga* that these features are integrated into a ‘siege’ of sorts, and King Haraldur Sigurðarson, frequently associated with tales of siege-breaking during his Mediterranean odyssey (for example in *Heimskringla*),²¹ is consulted in order to break the stalemate.²² Yet there may be traces of various other sources of knowledge and traditions in this scene. Glacial floods in Iceland and medieval field irrigation systems in Greenland could have been real-world inspirations.²³ Life inside a mountain and construction of fabulous ships link neatly with the representation of dwarves in the *Prose Edda*, such as

²⁰ *Króka-Refs saga og Króka-Refs rímur*, ed. by Pálmi Pálsson (Copenhagen: Møller, 1883), p. 29.

²¹ *Heimskringla: Noregs konunga sögur*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, STUAGNL 23, 3 vols (Copenhagen: Møller, 1893–1900), III, pp. 80–91. See also the translation in *King Harald’s saga*, trans. Magnús Magnússon and Hermann Pálsson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966; repr. 1977).

²² No actual source can be found among the stories told of King Haraldur Sigurðarson: it may be from a lost narrative or simply have been inspired by such narratives. It should be mentioned that at a later point in *Þjalar-Jóns saga* an actual siege takes place, when Jón and Eiríkur attack Röðbert’s fortress.

²³ I am grateful to Reinhard Hennig for suggesting glacial outburst floods as a possible inspiration for the episode.

those who created *Skíðblaðnir* (and let us not forget that Jón is fostered by dwarves after the death of his father and his escape from Roðbert). The close juxtaposition of the construction of a wondrous ship by a prolific craftsman and the unleashing of a deadly torrent may also bring to mind biblical and apocryphal stories of Noah. Whatever the elements which came together to make the scene as it stands in *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, the outcome and impression it leaves is ‘epic’, and the imaginative and detailed combination of elements can remain fresh and exciting to readers even today.

It should also be emphasised that chapter 3 in particular, despite having mostly gone unnoticed, stands out in the corpus of saga literature. The presence of both skaldic verse and a riddle, apparently in an eddic metre, is surely unique among *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*.²⁴ The stanzas are very corrupt and the riddle is fragmentary and of uncertain origin, but in many ways this simply heightens their esoteric appeal.

Manuscripts and Editions

The website for the ‘Stories for All Time: The Icelandic Fornaldarsögur’ project lists 46 manuscripts of *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, and since its compiling yet another manuscript (Lbs 4813 8vo) has come to light after being catalogued at Landsbókasafn, bringing the total to 47. The list includes both complete and partial texts: in fact two of the ‘defective’ items listed, AM 582 4to and AM 537 4to, were originally one manuscript (AM 582 4to contains just the final leaf, the vast majority of the preceding text being preserved in AM 537 4to). Three other of the items listed, AM 576 b 4to, AM 576 c 4to and NKS 1144 fol., do not contain the saga as such, but rather excerpts and summaries.²⁵ Papp. fol. nr 98 contains a Swedish translation. That leaves 42 complete or partial Old Norse texts of the saga.

Louisa Fredrika Tan-Haverhorst considers 33 manuscripts in the text-critical introduction to her edition, of which 30 are complete or partial texts in Old Norse. That means that there remain 12 texts, several in private or North American collections, for which, as yet, there are no theories as to where they might fit into a stemma. They are the following:

Arnarnagaeian Collection, Reykjavík: SÁM 6
Harvard University, Houghton Library, Cambridge, MA: Icel. MS. 32
Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore: Nikulás Ottensson 9
Landsbókasafn Íslands, Reykjavík: Lbs 3625 4to
Landsbókasafn Íslands, Reykjavík: Lbs 2497 8vo
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Private collections: Böðvar Kvaran 11 4to
Riksbiblioteket, Stockholm: Säfstaholmssamlingen I Papp. 3
Byggðasafnið á Skógum: Skógar (no shelfmark)
University Library, Yale, New Haven, CT: MS Z 113.81

The stemma which can be drawn up on the basis of Tan-Haverhorst’s findings regarding the 30 studied texts is as shown in figures 1 and 2 overleaf.

²⁴ An edition of the skaldic stanzas will be included in the ongoing project and series *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*; ‘Stanzas from *Þjalar-Jóns saga*’, ed. by Philip Lavender, in vol. VII, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur* (forthcoming 2017).

²⁵ In the Royal Library in Stockholm there is another manuscript containing an excerpt, Papp. fol. nr. 96., which is

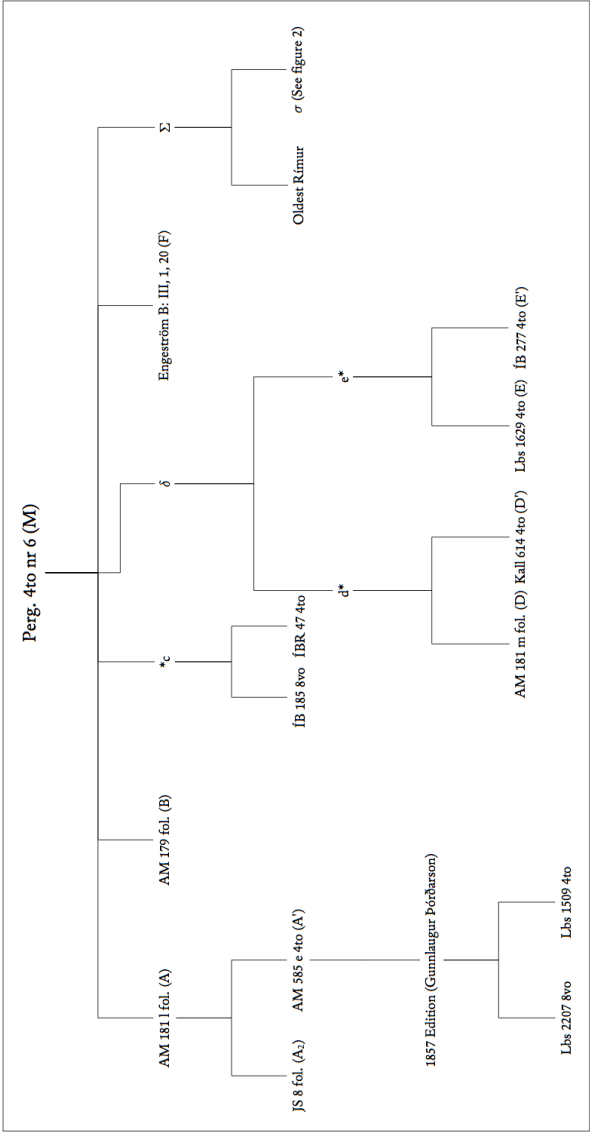


Figure 1. Stemma showing the main subgroups of texts of *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, as determined in the introduction to Louisa Fredrika Tan-Haverhorst's edition. For the manuscripts in the σ -group see figure 2. Connecting lines do not rule out the possibility of intermediate, non-extant, manuscripts. (NB. No chronology is implied by vertical positioning.). The relationship of the texts as shown here is somewhat simplified: for example, Tan-Haverhorst suggests that AM 585 e 4to may have been influenced by a c-group text (p.xvi), and Kall 614 4to shows influence from either a σ -group text or the oldest *kinnur* (p.xviii). Asterisks and Greek letters represent hypothesized non-extant texts.

There have been two editions of the text to date. Gunnlaugur Þórðarson's 1857 edition is based on three seventeenth-century Arnarnagæan manuscripts, principally AM 585 e 4to (called A; Tan-Haverhorst calls it A'), with lacunae filled out with and alternative readings supplied from AM 181 l fol. (B; Tan-Haverhorst calls it A) and AM 537 a 4to (C; Tan-Haverhorst calls it S'). Louisa Fredrika Tan-Haverhorst's 1939 edition reproduces the text from Perg. 4to nr 6 (there given the siglum M) up to the point where it breaks off (two sentences into chapter 14), and the continuation is taken from AM 181 l fol. (as already stated, there given the siglum A: see figure 3). Various snippets missing from the fourteen chapters of text in Perg. 4to nr 6 are also filled out from AM 181 l fol.,²⁶ and in the later part of the text Tan-Haverhorst judiciously includes a small selection of improvements which are well-testified in other manuscripts. Thus the edition, and hence this translation, which is based on Tan-Haverhorst's edition, presents a somewhat hybrid text.

There are good reasons why such a composite text might be of interest. In the first place, Tan-Haverhorst's study of the various texts is by far the most thorough to date. She presents Perg. 4to nr 6 presumably because it is the oldest manuscript by a long way (c.1400, following which there are 10 or so manuscripts from the seventeenth century). Yet presenting a translation of it alone would be frustrating for a reader seeking narrative closure. AM 181 l fol., from which the denouement is drawn, is said by Tan-Haverhorst to be 'ongetwijfeld een afschrift van' ('without doubt a copy of') Perg. 4to nr 6.²⁷ Thus the ending provided is as close to how we may imagine that the original ending in Perg. 4to nr 6 to could have been before it was damaged.

It is also worth mentioning that five separate sets of *rímur* (late- and post-medieval narrative poetry) are known to be based on the prose saga.²⁸ The earliest of these are from the sixteenth century (found in two manuscripts: AM 143 8vo, ÍB 634 8vo), and the author is unidentified. The other four sets, all from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, are composed by séra Hjörleifur Þórðarson, Guðmundur Jónsson í Hrúts húsum, Árni Þorklesson and Guðmundur Jónsson í Grímsey (in collaboration), and Guðlaugur Magnússon. Little will be known about their treatment of the narrative content until somebody takes up the challenge of carrying out a study of them.

Note on the Translation

No translation of this saga has previously been published in any language.²⁹ The chapter numbers here are included following Tan-Haverhorst's edition. Perg. 4to nr 6 has no chapter numbers, but rather large initials at the start of new sections. In the later manuscripts, such as AM 181 l fol., chapter numbers are included in place of those initials, and Tan-Haverhorst based her numbering on these later exemplars.³⁰ The translation stays close to the text, reproducing the mixture of tenses as they stand in the prose. This can sometimes be slightly

not currently listed in the online bibliography.

²⁶ On a couple of occasions, where AM 181 l fol. also has a lacuna, the lacunae from Perg. 4to nr 6 are filled out from other manuscripts, such as AM 181 m fol. (which Tan-Haverhorst gives the siglum D).

²⁷ ÞJs, p. v.

²⁸ Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 2 vols (Reykjavík: Rímnafélagið, 1966), I, 507–9; ÞJs, pp. lxxix–lxxxii.

²⁹ While this translation was being prepared for publication, it came to my attention that an MA-thesis had been submitted at Háskoli Íslands which also contained a translation of the saga (September, 2015). The author is Cecilia White, but I have unfortunately not been able to take her findings into consideration here.

³⁰ It should be noted that the number 'XX' appears to have been accidentally duplicated, thus appearing at the start

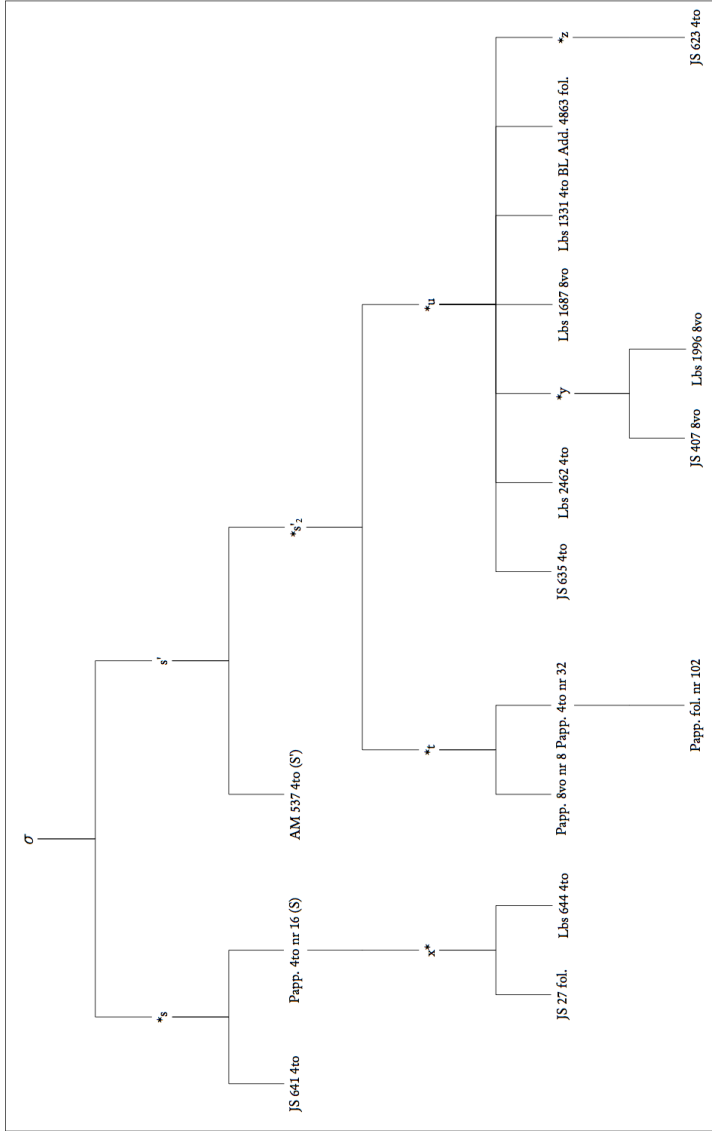


Figure 2: Stemma showing the manuscripts from the σ subgroup of texts of *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, as determined in the introduction to Louisa Fredrika Tan-Haverhorst's edition. Manuscripts which contain only excerpts (such as Papp. fol. nr 96) or translations (such as Papp. fol. nr / 96, as Swedish translation) are not included here.)

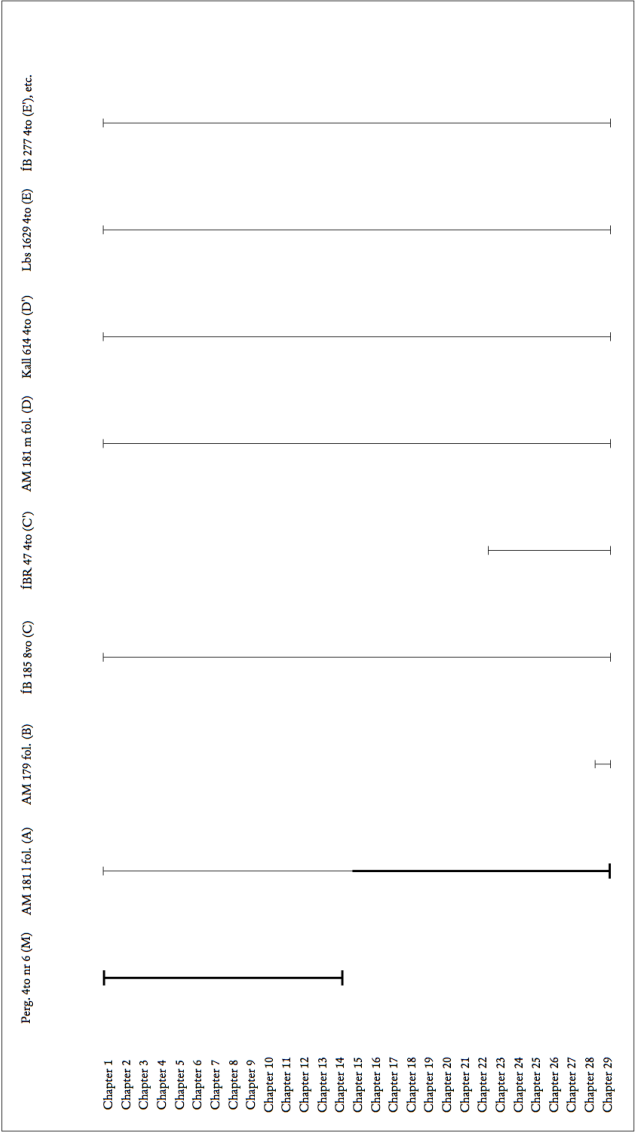


Figure 3: Diagram showing the proportion of the text of the saga represented in a selection of the oldest witnesses. As is clear, the majority of the manuscripts represented here contain the full 29 chapters, with only three presenting a defective text. The bold line represents the text which is used as the base of Louisa Fredrika Tan-Haverhorst's edition as well as this translation.

disorienting for a modern reader, but its retention can also help us engage with some of the dynamics of the story-telling as it would previously have been experienced, at once distant and then suddenly in the thick of the action. On some occasions it has been necessary to be somewhat freer with the translation in order not to sacrifice comprehensibility. One particular example is the frequent use of many personal pronouns in passages in the Old Norse, where the abundance of *hann* and *honum* ('he' and 'him') ends up sounding very clunky in a translation. On a few such occasions some liberties have been taken to make the referents more transparent with qualifiers.

The names of characters are normalized to an approximation of their Modern Icelandic forms (e.g. *Hlöðver* instead of *Hlöðvér*). This is most obvious in the presence of an epenthetic '-u-' in names ending in '-r' (i.e. *Eiríkur* instead of *Eiríkr*). This treatment is chosen partly because the resulting form may appear more approachable to English-speakers wishing to pronounce them, but also because the vast majority of the manuscripts of the saga are from a time period in which the linguistic change which led to the insertion of the vowel had already occurred. Place names present a particular problem in the saga. Where possible the Old Norse terms are translated with their geographical equivalents in English, but as with many other similar sagas, we must accept that the geographical and political make-up may be anachronistic (from a rigorous historical perspective) if not completely illogical (non-contiguous countries/regions are described as if they share borders). It must, however, also be borne in mind that the purpose of mentioning these various countries was not to provide an accurate historical and geographical treatise, but to create a cosmopolitan sense of wonder.

of two consecutive chapters in AM 181 1 fol. This means that all of the subsequent chapters, 22–29, are also in that manuscript numbered one less than they actually are. Tan-Haverhorst corrects this error.

Þjalar-Jóns saga

Here begins the saga of Jón, son of Svipdagur, and of Eiríkur the Curious.

[I]

There was a king named Vilhjálmur who ruled over Gaul.³¹ He was a powerful and excellent king, wise and benevolent. His royal seat was at Rouen in Gaul, because in the past Rouen was the principal city in that land. He was married to Elínborg, the daughter of King Hlöðver of the Land of the Franks. They had one son, who was named Eiríkur. He was the most handsome of men, large in stature and well-proportioned, able in all those pursuits which are befitting of an educated man. He knew many of those languages which were common in the neighbouring countries.

When Eiríkur was fifteen years old, his father procured for him five well-manned and -provisioned warships for his entertainment. He went raiding with them, and it was certainly profitable. And in the autumn he had ten ships and set course with them back to Gaul and spent the winter there with his father. And in the spring he has these ten ships prepared and went raiding in the East over the summer. He was victorious and had the upper hand wherever he fought. And in the autumn he had fifteen ships, loaded with wealth, and set course for home once more in the autumn and stayed with his father over the winter. And since this enterprise had gone well for Eiríkur, he went raiding a third summer with these fifteen ships and thus becomes renowned on his raiding expedition in the East, to such an extent that no warrior-king was thought to be greater than him. He never plundered merchants or peaceful men; and kings and nobles, if they heard of his journeys and raiding expeditions, along with his lineage and moral conduct, received him with feasts and invitations of hospitality, going to meet him with all pomp and a warm reception, and moreover on parting giving him great, costly gifts of invaluable treasures and jewels. Thus he had refuge in each and every kingdom. The fourth summer his voyage was prepared with twenty ships, and when he is ready, the king himself, his father, and Queen Elínborg, his mother, and all the people accompanied him out to his ships and wished him a good journey and that he return safe and sound.

[II]

King Vilhjálmur remains behind in Rouen in Gaul. At that time it was a large and densely populated city. It was also the case that south-east of the city was a high mountainous area, so great, broad and long that it was a cause for great sorrow that no supplies could reach them except by a longer route. The mountainous area was completely encircled with crags and precipices, so that nothing could get up there except for birds capable of flight. There, there were neither male nor female reindeer, nor any four-footed beasts. No man had set foot

³¹ Valland, Frakkland, Saxland, Flæmingjaland, Hólmgarður and Miklagarður are some of the important places visited. *Valland* is often used to refer to France in a vague sense, although it originally seems to have been the designation for Celtic Gaul. Since Frakkland, the Land of the Franks, is also mentioned, Gaul is the more appropriate designation for Valland in this narrative (to have France and the Land of the Franks existing simultaneously would be awkward), and that term will be used. We also, however, find Flæmingjaland, that is Flanders, which was certainly not a political entity while Gaul still existed. See the 'Note on the Translation'.

up there, and nobody knew what it might be like up there. Just in front of and at the foot of the mountainous region were wide level plains, fair meadows with babbling brooks.

The king greatly enjoyed ball games and jousting. It is said that one fine day the king summons his knights out of the city to a joust on the level plains which were previously mentioned. The king himself leaves the city and a chair is provided for him to sit on. And when he has been sitting for a while, it becomes apparent that he is not quite himself on that day as compared to how he usually is. He looks up towards the mountain and does not take his eyes off it. The king had two advisors, one named Amon and the other Abmon. They were brothers and had been with the king for a long time.

Amon approaches the king and spoke: 'Lord, why do you stare so intently at the mountain, so that you pay no heed to the games?'

The king answers: 'Something is different up there on the mountain, similar to when a cloud of dust is kicked up where a great many men ride. I suspect that somebody must be moving around on the mountain, where it must be quite challenging to get access to. For that reason it is unlikely that I would know of any creature having its abode there.'

And towards the end of the day they see that a man walks down from the mountain, a turn of events at which they marvelled greatly, because they see that neither ravines nor crags could impede him. He bore on his shoulders something that could best be described as a satchel or pack of some sort. He seemed rather large to them. He makes at once for where the king sits, with his retinue performing their games in front of him, and lays down his load and goes into the circle. It can be said that nobody greets him, but then he does not greet anyone either.

He goes before the king and addresses him in this manner: 'May you sit there, most blessed of all kings, in honour and high esteem, peace and happiness.'

The king took this well and asks who he might be.

He replies: 'Call me Gestur Gunnólfsson, but I cannot tell you of my lineage or native land. And "a beggar's errands brook no delay".³² Lord, I request lodgings from you for the winter.'

The king answers: 'I seem to be placed in rather a difficult position, as regards offering you lodgings for the winter, since you will neither state your lineage nor native land. I have moreover not made it a habit to take in men like you. I have the feeling that you will be difficult to provide for. You will have to seek elsewhere.'

Gestur answers: 'I think that I have never heard any king say such things. I won't wait a long time for that which won't be granted. May you live as the most infirm and wretched of all kings! I shall also bear word of your avarice and misery until I find another more wretched than you.' He then went briskly out of the circle of men, without directing a word to anyone.

The king is left behind and covers his face with his hands and spoke to his advisor: 'Go to this Gestur and tell him to come to me and that I want to talk to him.' He does so. Gestur then comes before the king and asks what he wants from him.

The king spoke: 'How was it that you came across this mountain, the same one which no man remembers anyone to have traversed?'

Gestur answers: 'I went across the mountain on my own two feet and I have cleared a path so broad that two wagons may drive along it side by side, and cleared away the shale and boulders into the ravines and crevices in the earth, so that they are now no more uneven than a highway.'

³² In other words, when one is asking a favour, it is better to get straight to the point.

The king spoke: 'That is quite some feat that you have performed. But what have you had besides your hands?'

Gestur answers: 'I dragged a kind of sledge made of tree trunks with rope around either end along the ground — if not the outcome would have been otherwise — and by this means shoved the large rocks out of the way. But those rocks which wouldn't budge I struck with a rock hammer and smoothed the remains over with this thing which I have here in my hand, and I worked on that for two months.'

The king looked at his hand-tool: there was a single shaft with iron tubes on the ends, and jutting out a piece of iron four ells in length and similar in form to a file or a chisel carved out of tusk. The king said that winter lodgings were at Gestur's disposal and said that he had well earned it.

'I will accept the lodgings,' he said, 'and this route across the mountains is shorter than you might imagine, since a lot of effort has been expended in clearing it, and nevertheless I would like for you to give a name to the route, since it will be traversed by many.'

The king did so and called it the 'File Road', and the name stuck, even to the present day. It is no more than a morning's journey to those districts which it previously took many days to get to. Now Gestur asked for a house to sleep in and a seat for him alone, one which nobody else would sit in. The king had that arranged, getting for him a malt-barn and a seat on the upper bench near to his retainers. Gestur made himself very comfortable in that house. He discretely fetches his belongings from the mountain, where he had hidden them. Gestur was always taciturn and had little to do with the other men.

[III]

In the autumn Eiríkur is seen sailing to land with thirty ships. The warship which he captained was fitted with tents made of costly cloths, and his fleet was quite magnificent. The king and the queen and all the people went to meet him. Now that Eiríkur has arrived home, he is soon told what this great Gestur has achieved in terms of road construction in Gaul. Many people thought that he must be a troll or a highwayman. But some entertained other suspicions. Eiríkur asked his men to stay away from that man. Gestur always ate and drank modestly, and treated the other men decently. He was, however, jovial with his bench-companions if they spoke to him. He was a large man and strong. The vast majority of the time he wore a cowl and a fur cloak, and it was hard to make out how strapping he was.

There was a man named Rauður, who was in charge of fitting out expeditions for the king. He was envious and deceitful by nature, strong and most likely a shapeshifter.

He speaks thus to the king: 'What could happen, even if I were to sit in Gestur's seat?'

The king said there was no need for that and that he would not have any part in it, should Gestur be displeased.

Rauður made good on his threat, and at that moment Gestur walked into the hall and asked him to go away.

Rauður answers: 'I think that this seat is not more poorly occupied than previously.'

Gestur then gripped him by the thigh and drags him out of the seat and sets him down on the hall floor so roughly so that the bones inside him broke. From that time forth he was never the same, and he was carried away. But the king did not blame Gestur for this. All men marvelled at his strength and exchanged glances.

On another occasion, Gestur was late to take his seat. Prince Eiríkur sat in the seat. The king asked him not to sit there, but he remained seated.

A little later Gestur walked into the hall and comes before Eiríkur and stood there a little while and spoke: 'You must think that it is a good idea to sit here.' And he walked away afterwards and out to his house. Eiríkur followed him out, and before Gestur had closed the door, Eiríkur arrived and asked him to let him in. Gestur did so, but was not all that quick about it. Eiríkur enters and sees that inside there has been hung such a fine wall-hanging that he has never seen anything comparable. It was embroidered with gold thread in many places and made with the utmost skill. Blankets had been laid on the floor, interwoven with silk in many places. There was a bed fit for a single person in the house, and the costly woven cloth on the bed was trimmed with fur, as was also the case with the pillow cover. Hanging over the bed was a single large gold ring. The prince took the ring down and saw that it was made out of thirteen sections,³³ and some parts were made of white gold, and others of red gold. He thought that he had never seen such a fine treasure.

He spoke to Gestur: 'Will you give me this ring?'

'I won't,' said Gestur. 'Do you think we are really so very different when it comes to generosity? When you came back from raiding you brought with you costly goods and coloured cloth and fine treasures, and I never asked you for anything, but then you didn't offer me anything. You sat in my seat, and I could see that you weren't keen on me staying for the winter.'

The prince answers: 'I wanted to put your nature to the test, Gestur, and for that reason I sat in your chair. So what's the ring called?'

Gestur answers: 'From iron-slag and gilt thread Sægrímir was made. So what is it?'³⁴

The prince answers: 'The hardest of iron-slugs is that which plays upon the heart of a man, in other words great sorrow. Gilt thread is red gold, and Sægrímir is white gold. And the ring has been made as a memento for the man who has experienced great sorrow, so that he shall often think upon his sorrows when he looks at it, and I name it Gáinn.'

'You are a wise man, prince, because that man was greatly distressed when the ring was made.'

The prince saw where three chests stood in the house. He asked Gestur to get the keys for him in order to open up the chests. Gestur got two keys for him, although somewhat reluctantly, and sat down on the third chest. The prince opens up the chests and sees that they are empty and thought that the wall-hangings and Gestur's bedclothes must have been in them. Eiríkur asked him to fetch him the third key in order to open up the chest which he was sitting on. Gestur said that that would not happen, unless they put each other to the test, 'but it may be the case that you will think your worst suspicions about me have been proved if I give you a run for your money.' He spoke this verse:

³³ The information given here can be compared with what is stated later in Chapter 13, where we are told that the ring was originally made of thirteen pieces, but then later divided into four.

³⁴ The name *Sægrímir* is reminiscent of *Sæhrímnir*, mentioned by Óðinn in *Grímnismál* as being a boar which is roasted and eaten every night but magically reconstituted in the morning. See Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 273. Gestur's riddling answer concerning the name of the ring, with its alliteration, can be construed as being in an eddic metre: 'Af sindri ok seimi | var Sægrímir gjör | eða hvat er þetta?'. Such a riddle, spoken by a mysterious stranger under the pseudonym 'Gestur', raises clear associations with the 'Gátur Gestumblinda' section of *Hervarar saga*, where Óðinn adopts the disguise of a man named Gestur inn blindi in order to challenge King Heiðrekur in a test of wits. See *The Saga of King Heiðrek the Wise*, ed. and trans. by Christopher Tolkien (London: Nelson, 1960), pp. 32–44.

The possessors of the shield (= warriors) will never hinder the maple tree of spears (= warrior); I lie awake early on account of that pain caused by the props of drink (= women). The launchers of the quarrel of arrows (= launchers of battle = warriors) will still be quick with words about me, such that I should not be completely safe, if I now quail.³⁵

Eiríkur became even more curious now to see inside the chest, when Gestur spoke thus, and asked him to open up. Gestur asked him not to blame him if he should come to feel worse off than before. Eiríkur promised sincerely not to. Gestur then fetched him the key and stood up from the chest, and Eiríkur unlocked it and found there in the end chest many smith's tools, exceptionally well wrought. And in the chest a wooden partition was fitted. Beneath it was a cloth or bundle of coloured fabric wrapped up in linen cloth. And when he unfolded it there was a velveteen cloth inside, and after that a silk cloth, and inside the cloth there was an effigy in the form of a maiden, dressed in fine-woven velvet and beautiful and lifelike, so that he would have thought, had it given off heat or spoken, that it was alive.

Eiríkur then spoke: 'She must be amazingly beautiful, the girl whom this effigy is modelled on, and I make this vow that I shall marry that maid, if she is untouched, and no other, assuming she is alive, and I shall not take a drink at home in Rouen at Yule until this is settled.'

Gestur smiled and spoke: 'You will never settle this matter if you rely on your judgement alone, and I will call you Eiríkur the Curious.'

'Then you must give me the ring as a naming-gift,' said Eiríkur.

'Far from it,' says Gestur, 'if I know what I'm doing.'

Eiríkur asked whether he knew how to make things with all those tools which were gathered together there and would fulfil the requirements of any kind of smith. Gestur said that he needed all of them. Then the prince asked whether he had made the ring and the effigy. And Gestur spoke this verse:

My mind laughs when appeasers of the seagulls of battle (= appeasers of ravens/eagles = warriors) bring your woman before me; I desire the Gefn (= goddess) of the headdress (= woman). I praise the beautiful Syn (= goddess) of the sea-day (goddess of the gold = woman) herself; the ground of buried silver (= woman) causes me suffering. The wolf knows what he had eaten.³⁶

'The Fenris Wolf knew what he was chewing on when he bit the hand off Týr, the son of Óðinn. I also know all too well where I have looked away from.'³⁷ I have sculpted this lifelike effigy. You would also be greatly impressed if you should come to see in the flesh the maid whom it was based upon.'

Then Gestur did not want to speak any more.

³⁵ Gestur's verse suggests a conflict and concern for certain women. Eiríkur, through his somewhat impertinent questioning, may be aligned with the warriors 'quick with words' (i.e. slanderers, accusers, taunters). Not responding to such taunts could be seen as a sign of weakness, and thus place Gestur (and the women he pines for) in danger.

³⁶ The first part of this verse is extremely corrupt and the translation is highly conjectural. One of the main problems is that the expression of longing for a woman seems much more appropriate for Eiríkur at this particular point, where he has just seen the effigy. Love would seem to be equated with a wolf devouring its prey, i.e. an instinctual imperative which disregards consequences or the violence of the action, although they are apparent. The prose that immediately follows presents a further nuancing of this interpretation.

³⁷ The meaning here is somewhat obscure. It could be a contemplation on revenge and hopeless inevitability: Fenrir knew that biting Týr's hand off would not do him any good, but bit anyway as payback for the betrayal. Gestur seems to state that he too knows all too well the wrongs done to him, as well as being reminded by the effigy, and thus also seeks revenge.

[IV]

The prince now walks out of the house, and his men stood around it and did not want to go in and interrupt their conversation. Eiríkur then goes to the royal hall and declares publicly what he has vowed along with the whole conversation that he had shared with Gestur. But the king and the queen and all the people became quiet upon hearing that and say that Gestur's machinations had caused all this misfortune.

And when spring arrives, the king asks his son what course of action he intends to take. Eiríkur said that he intended to set out from that land with thirty ships and seek his potential wife. The king asked him to try to convince Gestur to go on the expedition with him, but Eiríkur says that he can hardly ask for anything in this case. But they go to his quarters nevertheless.

Gestur stood up to meet them and greets the king warmly, 'and it is a rare occurrence to see you here! Is there some matter which you wish to tell me of?'

The king answers: 'I greatly desire that you go on this journey with my son and share your advice with him so that he may fulfill his vow, because it seems to me that you are somewhat responsible for all this.'

Gestur spoke: 'I was not the cause of your son's enquiries, although I would not use force to prevent him from seeing my possessions or lock them away from him so that he should have had to forcefully get access to them. Now I will travel with him if he agrees to give me the final word on what our troop, the two of us included, does for the duration of our trip.'

Eiríkur agreed to that then, and Gestur asked him to stop with his preparation of the ships. And as time passed, with a lot of the summer already behind them, Eiríkur came to speak with Gestur and asked how long he intended to wait, but he said it was not too late yet.

[V]

Gestur now asked Eiríkur to get eighty knights ready, those whom he knew to be most skilful and valiant with weapons, as well as twenty squires and cooks to carry out menial tasks. And when this host was fully assembled, Gestur says that they will ride along the 'File Road' and take the land route. The king accompanies his son on his way. The queen and the other people were deeply moved on saying goodbye to Eiríkur.

They now ride along the wide road, up to the point where the crags had been smashed and the 'File Road' cleared. There was a smooth road there so wide that two or three wagons could drive along it side by side, and there were walls on both sides so that nothing could be seen over them except for the bright sky. Every ravine and chasm in that place had been filled with rubble, and a gateway, which one had to ride through in order to find a resting place, had been broken through the wall of rocks.

Now they arrive at such a place and dismount from their horses. Gestur then brought out the ring Gáinn from under his cloak and spoke: 'Here is that ring which I know to be the most precious, because whosoever has it on his person may not be harmed by fire or sea, neither water nor venomous beast. Are you at all tempted, Lord, to receive it in exchange for your offer of winter lodgings?'

The king looked at the ring and spoke: 'This is a great treasure, but it seems to me that you are going to have more need of it now, and I would like for you to hold onto it.'

Gestur spoke: 'I was just curious, king, because I won't give this to anybody right now, if I have any sense. But I wanted to know whether you valued more highly your own greed or the outcome of your son's journey. Now I shall truly reward him for these words of yours, if I have the chance.'

They then sat down and drank, having fun listening to Gestur, and they said that he had fully earned his winter lodgings by clearing this route, which they had now seen, and it was more the work of a troll than a man.

Gestur smiled and said: 'He does not go alone to the forest, who accompanies another.'

After that the king and Eiríkur part ways, and the king wishes them well. And when Eiríkur and his men come down from the mountain to a flat plain, he and Gestur ride behind, because Eiríkur sees that Gestur is so weary that he cannot ride and is acting strangely. In front of a bank of earth Gestur took out of his sleeve a bundle of furs.

Gestur spoke: 'You will be a fitting accoutrement to very few people.'

He flung down the ring and rode on his way to where the others were. But Eiríkur turned his horse back and took the ring. And when he returned Gestur asked him why he had dawdled, and Eiríkur told him.

'You did well,' said Gestur, 'I want to tell you that at times such dark thoughts play upon this ring that I cannot hold onto it. And for that reason I put it down in an easily recognisable place, because I thought it more likely that I would find it there if I should resolve to turn back once the oppressive thoughts had passed away from me. And for that reason I rode behind, because I didn't want other people to notice this odd behaviour.' Eiríkur said that it would be thus.

[VI]

It is not said how long they rode along that route, but what is mentioned is that they come to a level plain at the foot of a mountain. On that plain there were large stones and beautiful rocky outcrops. Gestur went up to the stone which was largest and knocked on it with his hand. Immediately a door appeared there. Gestur went into the stone and came out a little later, and with him both a male and a female dwarf. They were short and the point on their bodies where their torsos divided into two legs was very low down. They were squat-faced and broad-nosed. They greet Prince Eiríkur, and he asked them their names.

The dwarf answers: 'I am called Svammur, and my wife is called Svama.'

Then Gestur spoke: 'I have asked this dwarf, who has been my foster-father, if he will loan you a sea-going vessel, in order to sail to those lands which I want to travel to, but he has expressed reluctance.'

Eiríkur asks what remuneration he will accept.

The dwarf says: 'If you will be mindful of your duty and proceed according to the instructions of this Gestur, who calls me his foster-father, it will then be tolerably sufficient, fate permitting, but not otherwise.'

Eiríkur said that he had agreed to that.

Now they go to their men (because Gestur had planned in advance that the dwarf should not be seen by any other men). They now sleep through the night. Eiríkur and Gestur arranged for a lot of meat and butter to be taken secretly to the stone during the night. And when they woke up, the two of them went to the stone, and the male dwarf and the female dwarf were

outside, cheerful and animated, and they greeted them warmly and offered them thanks for the large amount of delightful food which they had given to them. The dwarf then went up to a large boulder and knocked on its rocky wall, and the boulder split down the middle so that a door appeared. Inside was a quite splendid ship which was fully rigged, such that Eiríkur thought that he had never seen anything like it.

Svammur spoke then: 'You shall have the benefit of this, Eiríkur, because I and my wife and my children have come into your land and are your subjects; and secondly because you intend to go on a mission upon whose success I think a lot is riding; thirdly, and this is decisive, because my foster-son has every intention of accompanying you. Here then is the ship which I will lend to you, and I can say in its favour that space for another man will always be found when another berth is assigned, and there will always be a favourable wind when you want to sail somewhere. In addition I will assign my own and my wife's good fortune to you so that you may be successful.'

After that they kissed Gestur and wept loudly and went into their stone, and it closed behind them. And they went to their men and told them to get dressed and accompany them and see a quite splendid ship which was fully rigged in a cave. They launched it on the sea, and that was very easy for them. Gestur ordered them then to go aboard. They asked what to do about some of their group. Gestur said that it would all work out otherwise than they expected. And as the number of people increased, there was always found an extra berth when another one was assigned. And when they had loaded the ship as they wanted to, there was neither a surplus of men at the tables or in the sleeping quarters. Then a strong wind came, and they sailed out to sea, and that wind held up until they see a beautiful land and a large fortress with graceful towers approaching.

[VII]

Now it must be said that as soon as they see that land, Eiríkur asks Gestur if he knows anything about which land that might be.

Gestur answers: 'I think that I recognise this land, and it is called Hólmgarður.³⁸ And east of this land is Galizia, and to the north is Kænugarður and Russia, Kirjalaland, the Land of the Giants, Kvenland, the Land of the One-Footed Men, the Land of the Tiny People and many other lesser countries, and many kings rule over these kingdoms. This is called the Kingdom of Hólmgarður as far as it stretches, but some call it the Kingdom of the Tatars. All of the minor kings are liege lords of the King of Hólmgarður himself. Now we have arrived at Hólmgarður, from which place Kænugarður lies to the north, and to that fortress which is called Kastella. It is the fortress closest to the capital, and the town³⁹ just beyond the fortress is called Aspis. An earl by the name of Röðbert rules here over this fortress and that kingdom here which is part of Hólmgarður and Kænugarðar. He is so wise that he speaks all of those languages which I have been told are to be found in the world. He is also so intelligent that he is familiar with nearly all decisions. Very little which could be harmful to him takes him unawares. I would not

³⁸ Hólmgarður is Novgorod, but, as with other toponyms in this saga (see footnote 31), the place names here are used in such a loose way that it is difficult to see them as representing any geographical reality and are probably better understood merely as exotic eastern names. The region of Galizia (in modern-day Poland and Ukraine), for example, is south-west of Novgorod, not north, and Kænugarður (or Kiev) is certainly not north, but rather south.

³⁹ Aspis is actually called a *kaupstaður*, that is 'a place where goods are bought and sold'. In a general sense this is just any settlement of sufficient size for it to become a centre of trade, hence the translation here, 'town'.

say that he is good at giving advice, because as far as that is concerned I would consider him to be lacking. And yet you must visit this earl. He will offer you hospitality, because he knows that you are the son of a distinguished man and have come a long way. He will ask where you plan to sail to. You must say that you plan to sail out across the sea. He will say that it is late in the summer and he will offer you and your men winter lodgings in the fortress, since there are not so many of you. You must accept and ask him to provide a separate drinking hall and sleeping quarters with lodgings for you and your men, so that you will be comfortable. Say that your men are light sleepers and bad-tempered when they drink, and don't settle for anything less. And the earl will not then be able to retract his offer. He will inquire directly how many men accompanied you, and you must say that you have eighty knights and twenty servants. The earl will say that somebody else must have travelled with you across the sea. You and all the others must completely deny this, since your life depends on it. Say also that no living being has travelled with you. Start conversations often with the earl, because you will learn a lot from him. And we must go our separate ways for the time being.'

He dives off the ship now, and Eiríkur sails to the shore. The earl's men saw the ship and told the earl that they had not seen a more magnificent ship, and that it was completely painted above the waterline, and the carvings which were on the prows were inlaid with gold. There was also costly fabric used for the sails and tenting. And they said that they thought somebody important must be the captain of that ship. The earl then calls his advisor and asks him to invite the ship's captain back there, if he should be noble. He does as he has been commanded, goes before Eiríkur and greets him, because he had been told that he was the captain. He inquires after his name and lineage, and Eiríkur tells him. And when the messenger has carried out his mission, he goes to the earl and tells him. And when he hears that Eiríkur has come to visit him, he goes to meet him with his men and greets him most joyfully and invites him to a feast, and Eiríkur accepts. The earl asks him where he is going with such a small party, and he says that he plans to sail out over the Greek Sea and make the acquaintance of foreign chieftains and thus learn the customs of good men. And at that time such was deemed to be an honourable pursuit among wealthy men. And when the earl heard that Eiríkur planned to visit wealthy chieftains, he thought that his repute would be carried all that much further, the greater the honour that he showed to him. He asked Eiríkur and all his men to stay with him for the winter. Eiríkur gladly accepted that offer and asked him to provide a drinking hall and individual sleeping quarters and other lodgings. He said that his men were bad drinkers and intractable if they should take offence. And although the earl raised some objections to this, he wouldn't retract his offer to Eiríkur. He then asked precisely how many there were in Eiríkur's party. He said that he had eighty chosen men and twenty serving men.

'And one more,' said the earl.

'No,' said Eiríkur, 'nobody else came with us to this country.'

'Then it must have been,' says the earl, 'a horse or a hawk, a cockerel or some kind of creature, since I thought I caught a glimpse of something like that on your ship, when you were within sight of land.'

Eiríkur asked the earl not to imagine that he would lie to him over such a thing, which was of no consequence, and the matter was dropped. And Eiríkur received great hospitality from the earl.

[VIII]

It has been said that at some point before Yule, in the night, three boards sprang out of place from the wooden panelling around Eiríkur's bed. Gestur appeared and asked him to get up and come with him if he wanted to see the maiden whom he had sworn to make his own. Eiríkur got dressed up in his fur tunic and bound a piece of golden lace around his forehead. He picked up his sword. Then Eiríkur went out through the panels, and Gestur put the boards back in place, so that nothing out of the ordinary could be seen. They went down into the earth until they came to an outhouse, and in the cellar there was a pond, and one could walk along some of the walls, but in certain other places the water passed under one of the walls.⁴⁰

Gestur spoke then: 'Earl Roðbert has had this cellar constructed and this wall placed over the water, because he thought it would be his salvation, if men came to know of the cellar and waited in ambush for him, if he could leap into the water and dive under the wall.' Gestur proceeded now until he had flung open three doors. They were then in a living area. Inside were two women so beautiful that Eiríkur thought that he had never seen their like. He thought that he recognised the younger of the two women, since he had seen the effigy based upon her. The women embraced Gestur, and a joyful reunion between them ensued, and they sat him between them and called him Jón.

[IX]

And when they had been sitting there for a long time, Gestur speaks to Eiríkur: 'You have accompanied me out of your country on account of your curiosity, and now I will illuminate some things for you by means of a story. And it starts like this, that there was an earl named Svipdagur who ruled the fortress Kastella and this kingdom, which is subject to it, and Kiev and all of those fortified towns and farms and all the kingdoms which are subject to it. His father was Dagur the Strong, and Dagur's father was called Jón. The whole line of their ancestors had ruled over these kingdoms. Svipdagur had a queen, whose name was Likoridis. She was the daughter of Philippus, the King of Flanders. They had two children. The son's name was Jón, and the daughter's Marsilia. The three of us are now here, mother and children.

'And when I was eight years old, and Marsilia two, Roðbert came here with many ships and an overwhelming army, and he was freshly arrived from Serkland and was accompanied by vikings and black-men⁴¹ and many unpleasant types. He had also been raiding in the East and had acquired there three treasures which were so excellent that their like will not be found. One is the ring Gáinn, and every nine nights gold drips from it, such that one can live most comfortably on that wealth. The second is a sword, which he calls Sigurvandil, and he who

⁴⁰ The architecture is somewhat difficult to follow here, but it seems to be the case that Eiríkur and Gestur enter the cellar of a separate building through Gestur's underground tunnel. The pond which is in the cellar of this building also conceals a secret entrance and exit, allowing one to swim under the wall and make a speedy exit in case of an ambush. There is, presumably, also the normal entrance (stairs?), which is not explicitly mentioned, as well as the doors which lead into the subsequent chambers of the cellar, ending with the one where Eiríkur and Gestur meet the women.

⁴¹ In different contexts this word can be used loosely to refer to Africans, Ethiopians or, perhaps, berserks (*blá*-can be translated as 'black' and 'blue'). The conceptualization of the ethnic groups alluded to is hazy and involves a pejorative and problematic association of exotic otherness with antisocial and antagonistic behaviour. See, for example, Richard Cole, 'Racial Thinking in Old Norse Literature: The Case of the *Blámaðr*', *Saga-Book*, 39 (2015), 21–40 (pp. 36–37).

carries it will always be triumphant. The third treasure is a helmet, which is called *Ægir*. There is no man so insignificant that if he has it upon his head he does not seem awe-inspiring. These treasures come with this enchantment and fortune that the man who has them with him cannot be harmed by sea or lakes, poison or fire, or venomous animals or sword edges.

Now when Roðbert arrived in this country, he immediately sent men to the earl with these terms: to decide whether he wanted to fight on the following day or flee the country with his queen on account of him. Earl Svipdagur was a great warrior, and his luck had never failed. He said that he would rather fight than flee his country, and so he immediately had the war-arrow sent out, as might well be done when faced with Roðbert's hostilities, and he himself prepared his army for battle. And when Roðbert was told of the earl's choice, he worked himself up for battle that same day. And the earl left the fortress, and there was a hard battle, although not a long one due to the day being nearly over. Roðbert had a much larger army, and when he saw that he did not make a dent on account of the valour of the earl and the men of the fortress, he had the peace-shield raised and rested that night.

[X]

'Such a great number of men, both from the town of *Aspis*⁴² and from other nearby fortresses and farms, came to the earl that night that he now had only a slightly smaller army than Roðbert. And when Roðbert sees that, he accompanied his army to where there was higher ground and a good vantage point. He now cast himself headlong into fierce battle. The earl was on a horse and had a large mounted retinue with him, but he himself was the doughtiest warrior, and he attacked so fiercely that Earl Roðbert's army retreated from the high ground. Now he urges on the army, because he had equipped his selected warriors well with weapons and armour, and he himself was steadfast in chivalry and leadership of armies. A large part of his host was on horseback, and that was much to the detriment of the earl's men.⁴³

'For a long time there was no way to tell who would have the victory. But as the day wore on the army pressed forward against the earl and there were more deaths on Roðbert's side. He sees now that he will not be victorious on that day. He then has the peace-shield thrown up. And as night fell, and the charms which proceeded from Roðbert's weapons (which meant that Roðbert might not fail to be victorious) diminished, the earl thought that he would defeat Roðbert early the next day.⁴⁴

'The earl now rides with his host to the fortress and lets his guard down, because they were called truce-breakers who pounced on others at night, from the time when the white shield

⁴² *Aspis*, already referred to, is here called *Aspide* (though I have maintained the original name in the translation). The same variation is witnessed when the mountain is referred to, yet the text specifically states that the mountain was named after the town. The different forms are most likely a sign that the name was taken from a Latin source (*Aspis/Aspidis*, *Aspide* the ablative form). A scribe or author may have retained the Latin endings, rather than adapting it to a Norse paradigm, in order to retain a sense of the exotic nature of the locale.

⁴³ At this point both of the key players are at times referred to as 'the earl' or just 'he', leading to a certain amount of ambiguity as regards who is responsible for which actions. I have not attempted to clear up this ambiguity, which, although perhaps the result of scribal imprecision, neatly gives a sense of the chaos of battle, and its blurring of boundaries.

⁴⁴ Presumably Earl Svipdagur has noticed Roðbert's marvellous weapons, but does not know that they make him impervious (the comment in parentheses is directed at the audience as a reminder, not intended to be a statement of what Earl Svipdagur himself thinks). The fact that their efficacy decreases at night adds to Svipdagur's failure to recognize their significance. Otherwise he might be less sanguine about the possibility of victory the following day.

was raised until the red shield was borne aloft in the morning or the war-trumpet was blown at the start of hostilities.

[XI]

‘Now when Roðbert comes to the ships, he lets his men drink themselves into good spirits. After that he surreptitiously calls the armies together and begins to speak: “You are well aware that this earl is so difficult to deal with that he has nearly put us to flight, and that would have come to pass, had we not raised the peace-shield. Rush upon him and his host now from all directions! I do not intend to risk our necks in further encounters where the risk to our lives is equally great. You must now get kitted out as quickly as possible and use the element of surprise, force your way into the fortress and enter yelling and urging each other on.”

‘They did just that. And although a great host had been gathered, most of them became alarmed and panicked and woke to the sound of war-cries and the clash of weapons. The situation was the same in the place which Roðbert was shown to, where the earl rested. They surrounded the sleeping quarters and broke in. The earl leapt up in his underclothes and defended himself boldly. Roðbert pressed the attack so hard that the earl fell. He then ordered most of the men who had been close friends of the earl killed. Nobody put up any opposition. Most people then submitted to him because he seemed so terrible in the helm of *Ægir*. But since it was the custom of bellicose types to depose kings from their kingdoms and take possession of their wealth and lands, many foolish men said that it must be these possessions which he sought. Roðbert then had himself named earl. He came to find out that I was Earl Svipdagur’s son. He then had me arrested, and all people praised my stature and appearance. The earl drew his sword and wanted to strike me down by the hall wall, but at that moment the queen, my mother, stepped forth and pleaded for my life.

‘The earl refused that, but then said: “Since I intend to take you as my queen, I will not kill him in your presence.”

‘The earl ordered his men to drown me on the high seas far from land and stab me there and bring my blood to him. The men were not keen on doing this, because they thought that vengeance might be taken. Two retainers are mentioned, one named Hringur and the other Eilífur. They had been with my father for a long time and served him faithfully. They offered to carry out this deed, and a boat was acquired for us. They rowed with me away from land.

‘Then Hringur spoke: “We two brothers wish to grant you your life, though we know it will be the death of us.”

‘They took blood from me and collected it in a bowl and covered it over. They then took me to an island by the name of *Ilmarhólm*, so called because in that place there is no shortage of herbs and apples which one can live off.⁴⁵ Then they rowed back to land and said to the earl that they had killed me and cast the body overboard. The earl asked to see the blood. They reached forth the bowl, and the earl dipped his finger in the blood and lifted it to his mouth and spoke: “This is the blood of a living man, and you have deceived me and allowed Jón the son of the earl to live. Now you shall give your lives in his place.” Then he had Hringur and Eilífur taken and placed between two fires, because they wouldn’t reveal anything about Jón, and they both burned to death there. After that the earl puts a bounty on my head, twelve

⁴⁵ ‘*Ilmur*’ means ‘sweet smell’ or ‘perfume’, and thus *Ilmarhólm* is the ‘Island of Perfume’. Such fragrant and fruitful locations evoke associations of the earthly paradise.

marks of silver, if anyone should be able to tell him something about me. And since most people are predisposed to be scoundrels, should the chance arise, the following happened to me.

[XII]

‘There was a man named Haki, a farmer, and he frequently went out fishing. One day, when he rowed past the island, he saw that there was a man in the forest up in the branches playing around. It occurred to him that I must be there and how much money the earl had placed on my head. He thinks that he will get no mean compensation and rows back to land and goes hastily to meet the earl and tells him that he has seen a young and handsome man on Ilmarhólm and says that he thinks it must be Jón. The earl ordered his men to go to the island. Haki went with them.

‘They came to the island, then the men searched and could not find me. They surrounded the forest and thus searched for me. Haki led the way, but I took hold of a bird-hunting spear and aimed it at his eye, and it came out the back of his neck, and he fell down dead. The earl then became angry once more. But I did not have any weapons except for the bird-hunting spear, which I hunted with in order to get food, and they were barely wounded by it. Ultimately, I fell before the earl and laid my head on his knees and placed myself in his power. The earl ordered me tied up and taken back to land and from there to a forest, and all the retinue and Earl Röðbert accompanied me. All people grieved on my behalf. And just as I was ready to be tied to the oak trees, and they were bent together,⁴⁶ my lady mother came forth and pleaded for my life, because she hadn’t known that I had been found, because the earl concealed it from her. She pleaded her case insistently and said that she would betray him at the first opportunity if I should die that day before her eyes. It ended with the earl ordering that I should be placed in stocks on the barren land beyond the confines of the fortress. And no living thing which found itself outside of the fortress at night could hope to survive, neither man nor cattle, on account of the she-wolf who lived in the forest, as well as the other venomous beasts, and the situation is likewise in many places in the land when the sun sets. Then I was fastened into the stocks, and a thick iron girdle was placed around my waist and locked into place on the stocks. I was also fastened down with many other bonds across my limbs. The earl declared vehemently that if someone should help me, he would lose his life. After carrying this out, all the men rode home and locked the gates to the fortress, and everyone thought that I was sure to die.

[XIII]

‘When the men come home in the evening, my lady mother is aggrieved and racked with sorrow. She tries to figure out the best way for her to help me. Then she sends her maidservant with two pots of honey and, when nobody was looking, placed a gold ring on her finger. That

⁴⁶ The idea of some form of execution involving being tied to an oak tree is not well documented, although this is said to be the preferred form of torture of Rothi, a Ruthenian pirate mentioned in Book VII of Saxo Grammaticus’s *Gesta Danorum*. Another example which helps explain The idea of some form of execution which helps explain its origin can be found in one of the texts of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*: ‘Anis var fangaður í orrustunni og lét Hrólfur eikursprettu honum í sundur. Og lauk svo hans æfi’ (‘Anis was captured in the battle, and Hrólfur had him torn apart by horses [?]. And that was how he died’. (Chapter 34 in AM 589 f 4to, my own normalised transcription.)

ring had belonged to my mother's kinsmen and had many innate qualities, so that any man who had it could not die.

'The maiden went on her way until she found me, where I sat fastened to the stocks. She spattered honey around the stocks and on them. Next she gave me food and smeared all the honey over me and placed the thick crystallised honey in my mouth. She placed the gold ring on my finger. She cut the straps from my hands and feet and spread her cloak over me. Then she went away. The weather was cold, and I began to freeze. And when a third of the night had passed, I heard such a great disturbance in the forest that each oak-tree smashed to pieces against the others. Then a she-wolf, so large that she reached up only a little lower than the branches on the oaks, came forth. She was short-legged, stout, long-tailed and big-headed. Even if a hundred knights were to come up against her, they would all end up dead at her hands. And I saw certain death lying ahead for me.

'A conviction then occurred to me, when the writing was on the wall, that the being who had shaped heaven and earth and all creatures must be great. I made the firm decision that, should I come out of this unharmed, I would follow that faith. The she-wolf circled licking the grass around the stocks when she recognised the smell of honey. She licked me from my heels to my nape. My mother had sent me a knife and a belt, and I held onto the knife. And when she had licked me, the she-wolf reached her tongue into my mouth, because she recognised the smell of honey. I bit into the tongue and stabbed her from above, and held the blade in place, and with my other hand I reached into the mouth of the she-wolf and cut her tongue out at the root, and she flailed about so violently that the whole stocks were lifted off the ground and were smashed to pieces. I was then free. I had the she-wolf's tongue, but she lay in her death throes until she died. And so I was protected by that belief which I had held firm to in my heart, so that the she-wolf did not lay a tooth nor a claw on me, any more than if I had been a red-hot iron.

'I then put my cloak on and ran away from that place until I came below a large stone. I couldn't keep going from there on account of the cold, because my wounds were stiffening in the cold and I passed out. But when I woke, I was being carried by some being, and it ran incredibly fast and put me down upon a stone. This was the male dwarf and the female dwarf. They removed the iron girdle from me and cleaned my wounds in a washing-tub. They placed me in a comfortable bed and strove to fetch me everything.

'And when my wounds had healed, the dwarf spoke: "We can't stay here much longer now because of the magic and the troubles which will afflict your life if he gets his hands on you."

'After that they moved their home into King Vilhjálmur's kingdom, to that plain where they are now. Then the dwarf speaks to me and says that I should make the most of my father's legacy and make use of those good things which he made for him. He then hands me the ring, Gáinn, and says that he has taken it from Earl Röðbert while he was sleeping. And the ring had seemed to be in one piece, but was put together of thirteen pieces which had previously been one. He called it Gáinn as a reminder that I should be heedful of the wrongs done to me by Earl Röðbert, if I should get the chance to do something in that regard.⁴⁷ He also said that the earl had focussed his thought so much on this ring that its power was equal to that of two minds, which would affect whether I should be able to keep it in my possession. And for that reason we divided the ring into four parts in order that he should never get hold of it.

One of these scribes or authors has apparently, at some point, mixed up *eykur* 'draught animal, horse' for *eik* 'oak' and thus created a new method of execution.

⁴⁷ The verb *gá* in Old Norse means 'to pay heed to'.

‘I learnt many pursuits and skills from the dwarf. He also frequently told me of Earl Roðbert’s doings. He wanted to go ahead and marry the queen, but she asked that he wait three years until she had had time to recover from her grief. And since the earl has many enemies in the land, and the queen’s words held a lot of weight, he let himself be convinced. And once that period had passed, the earl brought up this promise and her betrothal. She then asked that he should wait for five years for Marsilia, her daughter, “and that match is much more fitting for you, since she is young, and I am old, and she doesn’t remember her father’s murder.” The earl was talked into it, and fixed his hopes on this.

‘I was then sixteen years old, at the time when I cleared the File-Way along with these dwarves. I planned to make a big dust-cloud on the mountain by filing each crag into two with the marvellous tools which the dwarf had made. Then we also designed the effigy of Marsilia, which you saw back home in Gaul. She is now ten years old, and I am eighteen. I have now reminded you of your oath. You must now choose whether you will be free of your declarations regarding Marsilia, or try to get her from the earl.’

Eiríkur answers: ‘I shall fulfill what I said I would, to have this maiden or no other.’ They affirmed their promise now. Then Jón spoke: ‘Now we must go away, and we have sat here too long, because the thoughts of the earl are now upon this place.’

[XIV]

Now they go away, and when they come out of the living quarters, the earl walks in the other end of the cellar with two men, one named Rogerus and the other Rodegir. They had been with Earl Svipdagur, and the earl had forced them into his service. He had on his head the helmet Ægir and was girded with the sword Sigurvandil.

Jón then speaks to Eiríkur: ‘We cannot harm the earl because he has his weapons. There is now no option other than to dive into the water and swim out under the wall.’ And that is what they did.

The earl speaks: ‘What was that lurking in the shadows in the cellar?’

Rogerus said: ‘A bird flew in through the window and swooped around the room and then flew out again.’

‘That’s a strange bird I glimpsed,’ said the earl.⁴⁸

He launched the spear which he was holding onto into the building. It struck Eiríkur in the thigh above the knee, and by that point he had made it into the water. Eiríkur pulled the spear out of the wound and dried the blood off with the lap of his kirtle. Then they dived out under the cellar wall. There was an opening on the outer side of the wall and it led to the passage under the cellar wall. Earl Roðbert dried off the spear and looked at it and says: ‘It seems as if there are drops of blood on the socket of the spearhead.’

Then Rodegir said: ‘That is red water-clay.’ The earl didn’t say much more.

But Eiríkur and Jón got out of the water.

Then Jón says: ‘There is no doubt now that the earl will have suspicions about how you were wounded, and if you conceal it from him, he will take that as proof that he was the one who wounded you, and that will be the death of you. Now you know that there have been two Norwegian merchants here over the winter. One of them is named Prandur and the other

⁴⁸ There could be a pun here in the Old Norse ‘undarlegur fuglssvipur’ (literally ‘a strange bird-swoop’): a *svipur* is both a fleeting image of something and a ‘swoop’ (as in the movement of a bird).

Árni. You have entered into conversation with Ingibjörg, their sister, and Þrandur has let on that he is extremely angry with you because of this. Now it is my advice that you discuss this with Þrandur, and you agree on a plan, so that the wound is attributed to him.’ And once he has told Eiríkur how he should proceed, they part ways for the time being.

[XV]

Now Eiríkur goes to the sleeping quarters, and they were locked, but he opens every lock, without the use of a key, and went over to the bed quietly and woke up his squire and asked him to go to Þrandur the Norwegian and tell him how he should act. He did so. Eiríkur remained behind and bound his wounds. Then he woke two of his faithful companions, and they went to Ingibjörg’s bower. Eiríkur sat down in conversation with Ingibjörg, as he was accustomed to do. And when the squire came to the quarters where Þrandur was sleeping, he knocked on the door. The other man asked who was there. The squire answered that that was irrelevant, ‘but I have business with you, which you will be curious to hear of.’ Þrandur opened the door and showed him into the quarters, and the squire struck up a conversation and told him of Eiríkur’s request and how everything should play out and in addition he gave him a purse of money, which Eiríkur had sent to him. It was a lot of money in gold and silver.⁴⁹ Þrandur was pleased with the purse of money and said that he would do as had been asked of him. The squire explained how things stood to Eiríkur, and Þrandur woke Árni, his brother, and told him of Eiríkur’s message and shows him the money. The brothers saw eye-to-eye on this.

Þrandur now walks into the lodgings where his shipmates slept and woke them up and asked them to accompany him. Then he went to Ingibjörg’s bower. Eiríkur sat on the edge of the bed, but Ingibjörg lay in the bed. He was dressed thus, in underwear with an under-kirtle and long cape over the top. Under the cape he had the patch of his kirtle which he had bled upon. Þrandur came to the bedroom where Eiríkur was and leapt at the door so hard that it was flung open. He lowered his spear at Eiríkur and aimed it at his waist. But he swerved so that the spear landed between Eiríkur’s legs. He then rubbed the patch of his kirtle on the spearhead, so that a rent was formed. Then the spearshaft was bloody and likewise the spearhead. He then tore the bandage off his wound and bled a great deal, and secreted it under his belt. Eiríkur then leapt up, and Þrandur ran out, and at that moment Árni, Þrandur’s brother, walked in and asked Eiríkur to declare his own terms of compensation for that heinous deed. This whole ploy was carried out in such a sly manner that nobody suspected otherwise than that Þrandur had wounded Eiríkur. They said that it was bound to happen sooner or later.

[XVI]

The news that Þrandur had wounded Eiríkur spread like wildfire. Eiríkur sends for Earl Roðbert and has him informed that he is wounded. The earl came quickly and tended to Eiríkur’s wound. He now wanted to know whether it was the same blood which Þrandur had on his spear and dipped his tongue in it and now realised that it was one and the same blood and it came from Eiríkur. The earl then discreetly asked those men who had been present

⁴⁹ The text reads ‘fé frítt í gulli og silfri’, which makes little sense since payment is either in kind (‘frítt’) or in money (‘í gulli og silfri’). Perhaps the text originally read that he paid him in both money and kind.

about the wound, and all of them said that Eiríkur had been wounded by Þrandur, because nobody knew otherwise.

Eiríkur's wound healed quickly, and he was back to full strength in no time. He often talked with the earl and learnt from him many entertaining things and various languages. The earl often had his knights perform in jousts for entertainment, and Eiríkur proved to be extremely skilled in all forms of chivalry and accomplishments. Men praised him greatly. The earl said it would certainly be justifiable if his leg-wound had been avenged. The earl thought that Eiríkur would have avenged himself if Þrandur had been the one to wound him, assuming there had been no trickery. On account of these words of the earl, Eiríkur came to speak with Þrandur and Árni and said that the earl accused him of fear and cowardice, since he did not avenge himself, and thus he was suspicious about whether he had wounded him.

'Now the time has come when it is safe for the ships to sail, and it is my suggestion that you sail away from this place.'

Eiríkur gave fine gifts to the brothers and to Ingibjörg fine clothes and many great treasures. They parted on the best of terms, and they sailed north to the countries there and were thought to be the best of merchants, and they are now out of this story. Now the rumour circulated that the brothers left so quickly because Þrandur feared vengeance would be taken. Now most of the earl's suspicions were soothed. Eiríkur was esteemed by all men for his cheerfulness and humility and generous gifts. He was also a wise man, and many sought to confide in him in order to receive wise counsel.

[XVII]

It is said that once when Eiríkur lay resting, Jón came to him and asked him to get up and go with him. He did so. They took exactly the same route as before, when Jón had dug out the underground tunnel leading to Eiríkur's sleeping quarters. They came to that chamber where the mother and daughter were. They greeted them warmly. Then they sat down, and Jón speaks to Eiríkur.

'Now I shall tell you my scheme, which I have devised over the winter. I have carved out a doorway in Mount Aspis and fitted a door into it with huge wooden beams and turf laid over the top. The mountain is full of water. I have ready and waiting there a ship and eighty men, those who are the most worthy and noblest in this country. I have ensured their loyalty to me with gifts of money. I have also fitted out your ship, and it is on the water there ready by the coast. Now I want you to ask the earl to call a meeting on the plains which are just outside of the fortress. There are flat expanses there up to the mountain and lying in from the sea. The ship is floating there at the foot of the plain. All of your men should board it there. And above the plain is that doorway which I have cut out of the mountain. Now I want to know whether you have kept the ring Gáinn safe since you placed it on your hand.'

Eiríkur said that he certainly had kept it safe.

Jón said: 'I knew that you would take on that responsibility, and I wanted to test your sagacity. But if the earl arranges the meeting, you must go unarmed before him with excellent treasures and the ring in your hand. The earl will recognise the ring and assume that you want to give it to him. He will then take his helmet, Ægir, and sword, Sigurvandil, off. You must then take the helmet and the sword and make a run for it and see whether you can make it to your ship. Your life and fate depends upon you getting hold of those treasures, because

then you will be taking the earl's good luck with you. But he won't, however, die on the spot. And at the same moment that you do this, I will be up above releasing the water out of the mountain down onto the earl's army. Along with it will come the ship on wheels. I shall make sure that my mother and sister are on it, Rogerus and Rodgeir too. We shall then sail to Gaul. And if you get hold of the treasures, you must mind not to look back. And you must have the meeting arranged for three days from now.'

After that they part from the ladies feeling most happy. And when they came out of the living quarters, the earl walked in the other end of the cellar. Jón quickly removed the two loose boards in the wall-panelling of the cellar, went into the narrow tunnel, and replaced the boards.

The earl says: 'What crashed there in the dark?'

Rodgeir says: 'The door slammed.'

They all then continue on their way. Jón and Eiríkur parted with the plan laid out as described.

[XVIII]

In the morning after breakfast Eiríkur came to speak with the earl. 'You are aware that you have hosted us here over the winter both well and nobly. Now I ask of you that you have the people of this fortress summoned to a meeting on those plains which lie outside of the fortress, your assembly place, so that they can see there the gifts which I want to give to you.'

The earl said that he showed his distinction in such behaviour and hurries off.

Yet as a result of Eiríkur's persuasiveness all the people were summoned out of the fortress. The earl himself accompanied them out onto the plains which lay at the foot of Mount Aspis. On the outer edge of the plains was the town, which the mountain took its name from, and many men came from there. The plains were laid out in such a way that there were slopes on either side, and each side was bordered by a lake, but the sea lay at the foot of them. There by the coast was moored the ship which Jón had prepared. There was a quay jutting out from the land, and all of Eiríkur's men waited there.

Now Eiríkur proceeds before the earl with many excellent treasures and the ring Gáinn. And when the earl sees the ring Gáinn, he removes his helmet and lays his sword down on the ground, because he thought that Eiríkur would give him the ring, and he became wide-eyed at this sight. And it is the custom of noble men to lay aside their weapons when they receive gifts from distinguished men.

Eiríkur takes the helmet and places it on his head, and he slides the ring Gáinn up to his elbow. He takes up the sword, Sigurvandil, and draws it, and then most people are not eager to be in his way. He then breaks into a sprint, and men were scrambling over each other. Most of them were heading away, because they did not think it would be a good thing to stand before him. Earl Röðbert calls out loudly and ordered his men to apprehend him. Men then leapt up, and there was no shortage of the clanging or clashing of weapons, din and shouting. But since the earl's retinue, the knights and the noblemen, were positioned nearest to him, it was not possible for them to get hold of Eiríkur, because by that point he was way beyond the chosen warriors, and the slaves and villagers were not very courageous in attacking. It was also one of the qualities of the helmet Ægír that men fell down on all sides when they looked him in the face.

And when he had his hands full, and the earl's retinue was close by and sought him out, then all the men heard a great and powerful crash in the mountain. Immediately after they saw a large sward of turf, a wall made out of beams of timber, all fixed together, embedded in a doorframe and locked into place with large iron bars. It was all made with so much skill, that many small rivers were dammed up, with the effect that the narrow waterway behind was powerfully swollen with water. Men had wondered throughout the winter about the drying up of the rivers. Many large wooden beams, which had been put in place to strengthen the wall, were employed in this construction. Along with the great crash and outpouring of water from the mountain there came a great 'dragon' or ship. It was all painted above the waterline, and the dragonhead on the ship was golden. It ran on wheels and went in a straight and level path and headed directly out towards the sea. There was a man holding onto each rope, and they supported the ship so that it would not tip over. The ship now rolls in the powerful torrent as fast as a bird flies. Jón had built this ship over the winter with the help of seven craftsmen. First he had had a wooden platform constructed, on which he built the ship, so wide that it touched both sides of the mountain. He also made the doors in the mountain and the section covering the doors. Towards it he directed the large river which had previously flowed out on the side away from the fortress. There were smaller settlements there, and he thought that they would be slower to get suspicious. On account of this channeling of the water, the lakes on the mountain dried up. There were many crags and peaks on the mountain which one might now access without getting one's feet wet, and yet ships below. There were flaming torches there night and day so that no corner was in shadow. And when half a month remained until he intended to launch the ship, he blocked all of the waterways which led out of the mountain. The dragonboat then rose up, so that the dragon-head was on a level with the doorway on the same day as the meeting was arranged. This plan was so cunningly devised that the waters might be made to recede or augmented, because some of the waters rose more rapidly than others, but could then be gradually diverted. There is hardly another plan which can be deemed so ingenious or feat so daring that has ever been carried out in that land.

[XIX]

Now the story must be picked up again at the point where Earl Röðbert and his men see this great wonder, and they become terrified and panicked, and each of them wants to save his own neck. But that is not possible, because there were lakes on both sides of them and the deep blue sea lay ahead of them. But Eiríkur sprints as fast as he can and never looked back until he reaches his ship. He benefitted from the fact that he was always the fleetest of foot and swiftest in all things. They then set sail, because a fair wind was blowing out to sea. And it was at the very same moment as the men of that country arrived on the quay, that their enemies came together, and 'the fox saw the dog, but the dog was oblivious'.⁵⁰

Now it should be told how the earl was up on the plains with his retinue of knights and the men of his country. At that time there were also black-men with him and many other unsavoury types as well as all those people who had not died with Earl Svipdagur and outlived him. He now understands the whole ruse. And faced with this marvel, which the people saw,

⁵⁰ The most reasonable interpretation of this would seem to be that the 'fox', i.e. the one being chased, is Eiríkur, who is reunited with his men on the boat just as the men pursuing him arrive on the quay. Those men are the 'dogs' so intent upon their pursuit that they do not see the great danger that lies behind them, i.e. the torrent of water.

that the big wooden beams and the large ship come rushing down with the powerful torrents, and realising that the people who were in the way stood no chance of surviving, some of them leapt into the lakes, but the vast majority of the assembled people were caught in the way of those big wooden beams and the large warship. Nearly all of them drowned there, except those ones alone who were brave enough to fling themselves into the lakes.

The big warship comes all the way to the sea with all on board safe and sound, and at such a pace that it is quickly very far from land. Jón Svipdagsson is aboard with eighty men. Rogerus and Rodegir, who had been Earl Roðbert's servants, were there, because he thought that nevertheless he might be able to count on their loyalty, because they received great distinctions from Earl Svipdagur. Jón also had Likoridis with him, who was the mother of his mother and the daughter of King Philippus of Flanders.⁵¹ It had happened on one occasion during the winter that, when Eiríkur passed an attic room, he had seen an old, feeble lady. She was worn with age, as tends to be the case with old people. She had white hair. And when Eiríkur saw Elínborg and Marsilia her daughter, Jón had asked him whether he had seen any woman like that. And he explained how that had come to pass. Jón said that she was called Likoridis and was the mother of his own mother, Elínborg. From such things one may note what a wise and perceptive man Eiríkur was. A large group of other noblemen also accompanied them, though they are not named here. Jón also had the sons of many noble men on his side and their loyalty, though they themselves did not travel with him.

[XX]

Now we should tell how Roðbert and many other men are carried along by the water. There were also many who were carried out to sea, and a great number of men drowned there. But the earl started swimming, as did those men who were most capable, and headed for land. The earl also saved the lives of a great many men, and they all praised his courage.

And when all those whose lives could be saved had made it back to land, they headed back to the fortress. Many people who had seen the marvellous events came to meet them. The earl said that the men should hurry to the ships and sail after them. Everyone who can then hastens to the fleet which the earl had assembled for raiding. So many people came together that the earl had ten ships. They hoisted the sails and rowed off. But when they had come a short way from land, they suddenly saw that the ships were filling with sea-water below them. They then wanted to take in the sails, but that was not possible because there were strong gales. So they were carried a long way out to sea. The earl was then so raging and furious that he ordered them incessantly to keep up the chase, and it ended with the ships completely filling up, before they cut the stays and brought down the sails. And as a result of that some of the ships were capsized, because the sails got tangled up over the edge of the boat, but those which remained upright were destroyed due to the fact that it was impossible to bail all the sea-water out, and the inclement weather was so extreme blowing out from the coast that nobody could make it back against the weather.

Those ten ships were lost there, so that no man made it back to shore alive, except for Earl Roðbert. He dived under each breaker and headed back to land. Many men were waiting on the

⁵¹ The text seems to be confused here. We have already been told (in chapter IX) that Jón's mother is named Likoridis, but here we are told that Likoridis is his grandmother, and his mother's name is Elínborg. Elínborg is the name of Eiríkur's mother, first mentioned in chapter I.

coast, and they all praised his courage, that he had made it alive out of that peril. The earl was very unhappy with how things had turned out: he had lost a great deal of manpower and was himself greatly weakened. Jón and Eiríkur's ships had also been lost from sight. Earl Röðbert now went home to the fortress and ordered his men to eat and drink and told them all to come to him in the morning in the fortress. That was done, but because the earl seemed angry to the people, and because it wasn't possible to know what he would do or how it would turn out, people were not quick to come and meet with the earl. He then has the people summoned all together in the fortress and asked good men to give him wise counsel about how to solve his predicament, 'and I have considered summoning all the people from the town, Aspis, because you have kinsmen, friends and relatives there who are yet to be seen.'

Everybody said that this was advisable, and moreover that the fortress would be at its strongest if it could count on the strength of the town, and a memorable loss of life would be the outcome for the party which was slow to take advantage of it. It was now agreed upon that a meeting would be called in the town.

[XXI]

Röðbert now has the people summoned to an assembly in the town, and a great many people are gathered. He called upon many people who lived nearby, and they had to travel over the big lakes which had poured out of the mountain, and it was late in the day before all of his troops managed to get anywhere, because all the ships which were moored at the fortress were damaged. Some people got hold of small boats or rafts and conveyed themselves to that place in such manner and navigated the currents around the strait on skiffs. Röðbert helped in whatever way he could, but it took a long time. The day was nearly over by the time the meeting was convened, but it was well-attended, because some people had to check on family members, and others on friends. But those men who had sworn loyalty to Jón were forbidden by him to attend the earl's assembly and came to no harm as a result, while the others, the townsmen and people from the countryside who had not been warned off, suffered greatly.

Now Röðbert stands up and says the following: 'Everybody is aware of the loss of life, livestock and wealth that we have been subjected to by the evil traitor named Eiríkur and the many people who have been accomplices in his plans. Nor is it unknown to you how I treated him well, and how he deceived me and said he wanted to give me gifts and proceeded with many fair and treacherous words, which were later laid bare when he took those two treasures from me, the likes of which have never been possessed. One of them was the helmet Ægir, and the other the sword Sigurvandil. Nothing could withstand its blow, and whoever wielded it was always assured of victory. But you cannot be told of all the characteristics of the helmet. He also had in his possession a treasure which was stolen from me ten years ago, the ring Gáinn, and that man who wears it can never be taken unawares.

'Then he made the waters come crashing down on us from the mountain, and along with them the ship upon which was the beautiful Marsilia. And I saw her clearly where she was sitting on the canopied deck as well as Elínborg, her mother. I also saw there a man who I believed to be dead. He has moreover been the cause of all of this treachery and has been the brains behind it. You are also aware that they drowned all of those people who had assembled there, so that only a few escaped with me. And when we made it to dry land, we took ten ships and sailed after them, but didn't notice that they were damaged on account of our great

anger. And every last man drowned there, but I alone made it back to land. Now there is no seaworthy ship anchored at the fortress. I was made to feel the loss of my companion instead, since the beautiful and noble Marsilia was gone, and you all have lost kinsmen and friends and untold wealth. I will never know happiness until I get her back. And yet though I have suffered greatly, you have lost even more: kinsmen and friends, wives and children and all kinds of treasures. You will not soon forget this sorrowful parting—and tell me, what man has wrought greater evil in this land? But now I ask of you all—soldiers, townsmen and all my countrymen—since we are in a most difficult position, that you all grant me your trust and support to avenge this insult and wrong which has been committed upon us. I now ask all of you that you give me good advice in this, but I will be your leader in such matters. Were it my decision, we would immediately go and raid Gaul and burn and torch everything, because I stake my life on it that this shall be avenged.’

His speech was well-received by all the people. They said that it was necessary to avenge the wrongs that had been done to them and all the destruction that had been wrought on that land, but they said that there were no warships ready in that place, and all the others which they knew of were nothing but cogs and merchant vessels, not appropriate for making war. It could be discerned by their words that the men of the town wanted to dissuade the attempt to go raiding that summer by listing the difficulties associated with it, and they considered them to be significant. Then the common people stood up and everyone else with them and ruled out the possibility of making an expedition abroad that summer. They said that this revenge would have been appropriate to carry out, were it not for the fact that it would be even more harshly repaid. They all guessed that Jón must be alive and that he had been the cause of these deeds. They remembered then all of the good will that Earl Svipdagur had shown to them. They also said that he had no hope of support that summer. That having been said many of the men of the fortress went away. The people were much less eager to give Earl Röðbert any help at that time.

Now the earl sees that the people of that land have turned away from him. He now discusses with his friends what he should do. They come to the agreement that he should carry out the expedition the following summer and win friends to his cause over the whole country by means of costly gifts. Earl Röðbert now sees that people will not be subservient to him in other lands, if he travels with a small host, when they deny him support in his own kingdom. The assembly is now broken up, with the expedition planned for the following summer. The waters from the mountains had by that time receded so much that it was possible to traverse that place on horseback. Let us now leave Earl Röðbert to sit and scheme.

[XXII]

Now we must tell how Eiríkur and Jón had fair winds. They came with their ships to Gaul and come to rest in the royal anchorage. Nothing was covered in cloths that weren’t furs, nor were there any sails but silk ones. Their arrival was quite magnificent, because the weather was calm, and the sun shone on the dragon-head. Everything was covered in gold, and the ships were painted in a tasteful manner above the sea-line. The poop-deck on the warship was draped in white fur.

Now King Vilhjálmur is told that his son, Eiríkur, has arrived back in the country. He then had all the people summoned together out of the fortress to meet him. A very joyful

reunion ensued, and the king invited them home to a lavish feast and to stay with him, along with all their men, as long as they wanted. They accepted that offer. The king himself and Queen Elínborg went to meet Marsilia and her mother. All men marvelled at her beauty and attractiveness and excellent courtly manners, because nobody thought they had seen her like. The king placed them in the high-seats beside him, and there was no lack of fine dainties or varied entertainments. Eiríkur then announced his proposal, and asked for Marsilia's hand in marriage. Jón and his mother responded favourably to his request and said that it would be fitting, since he had put his life in jeopardy on account of their tribulations. An agreement was reached that Marsilia should be married to Eiríkur on the condition that he should go raiding to Jón's inherited lands with him and get together an army for that purpose and not leave until Röðbert had been killed.

The feast was then prepared, with no expense spared, and there was no person who was not invited. There was no shortage of the finest men, whom Eiríkur invited from all over the land, all earls and noblemen, who were thought to be the most distinguished. Jón was also accompanied by many men who had been the most respected at his father's court in the kingdom of Hólmgarður. And there was no lack of provisions. And when the guests were sitting there enjoying themselves, Jón had a seat fetched and sat down on it and told the whole story about how Earl Röðbert toppled his father from the kingdom and how he wanted to kill him and what help had been forthcoming and which bay he had rowed out into to find him. He brought forth the sword, the helmet and the ring, and explained their characteristics, and everybody praised them and spoke well of the feast and of the good fortune that they had been able to escape from their hardships. At the feast Jón gave all the possessions, which Röðbert had taken from them, back to Rodgeir and Rogerus and all the noblemen, if they should accept him as the sole leader over the country. He and Eiríkur gave impressive gifts to all the men, and they promised to give him their support. The wedding lasted half a month, and nobody remembered having been witness to such a feast. No men were now considered worthy of such high renown as the foster-brothers.

[XXIII]

Summer now passes by, as does winter, and spring arrives. Jón comes to speak with Eiríkur and asked him whether he wanted to make good on his promise, 'because it seems to me that you have thought very little about it, but instead embrace your wife joyfully and light-heartedly.'

Eiríkur says that sixty fully-prepared ships were moored off the coast, but said that he intended to get another sixty from a levy. Jón thanked him for his support and said that it would be sufficient if they had sixty ships. He said that most of the people of that land would be turned to his cause. Eiríkur said that he had heard rumours that Earl Röðbert wanted to send out a levy and said that he would prefer to have a greater force at his command than the people of that country. They had one hundred and twenty ships. Accompanying them on the expedition was Marsilia the beautiful and all those men who had left Hólmgarður with Jón. But King Vilhjálmur and his queen remained behind and they parted with Jón with much affection.

Now we should tell how Earl Röðbert had a rampart and moat built around the fortress Kastella, so great that they could not be crossed, and he filled the moat with water. He also

had improvements made to the fortress walls, where they were broken. Then he had each of the gateways into the fortress sealed with iron doors. Then he had supplies of water channelled into the fortress so that he could be not conquered by means of fire or weapons. He then also had an extremely strong tower constructed out of the hardest bricks. It was so high that from it one might see across the whole of the land and far out to sea, if enemies were attacking. Earl Röðbert had had that tower built for the eventuality that if the fortress was taken, he might defend himself from the tower. This tower was made with such great craftsmanship, that no man could devise how it might be taken. Men say that the stone wall was sixty fathoms high and eighty fathoms from one side to the other and ten fathoms thick. Up on the stone rampart a marvellous tower was to be found with polished glass windows adorned all over with gold and silver, as much as was deemed tasteful, carved and engraved both outside and in with marvellous artesanry. Up on the tower was a weathervane, and attached to it a flag of gold-woven fur with a coat-of-arms upon it. The tower was circular inside and had wooden steps curled up it like a sea-snail shell, and that was how one came up. Earl Röðbert slept there each night with one hundred men. He had had work begun on these constructions as soon as spring came, while Jón and Eiríkur were away, and proceeded with it throughout the summer and the winter to arrive at this point. He did it because he did not want to rest everything on the men of that country, because he thought they would be unreliable if Jón were to arrive. They were now three nights away from all of Earl Röðbert's troops arriving in the fortress Kastella, those who were expected to respond to the levy. That troop was better inclined to Jón, son of Svipdagur, than to Earl Röðbert.

[XXIV]

Now we must turn to Eiríkur and Jón. They had favourable winds, and nobody spied them en route. They are now one night's sailing away from Hólmgarður, three nights before Earl Röðbert's army is supposed to enter the fortress, Kastella. Then Jón asked Eiríkur whether he preferred to besiege the fortress and risk having Earl Röðbert fight against them, or take the town, so that the earl should have no hope of support from that direction, 'because people will be wary of us after having suffered so greatly on our account'.

Eiríkur chose to besiege the fortress, 'but I think that our advantage in numbers, should the earl choose to fight, will not be too great.'

They now separate their forces. Jón rushed into the town with his troop. The men of the town had arrayed themselves in battle ranks and armed themselves, and there was some resistance. But since Jón had a fine and large troop, things quickly went badly for the men of the town. Jón pushed ahead and struck out on both sides, and all fell back before him. It ended up with everyone submitting to Jón and pledging themselves to him. It is said that that night Earl Röðbert had gone to the toilet. He had seen out from the window that a fleet of ships had arrived in that land and a large army was approaching the fortress and the battle in the town. He then ordered that the people of the fortress be woken up and told all men to arm themselves, since 'we are not so superior in might compared to this group of people who have come here. Let's prepare ourselves boldly, and let's turn the tables before the town has been won, and they come to their support.' And now Earl Röðbert rides out of the fortress with all of his troops.

[XXV]

Now Eiríkur sees that the earl, the king with his troops, wants to fight. Fierce battle now breaks out. Earl Röðbert had a greater army, and he himself was right in the vanguard: he now urges his men on. Eiríkur fought and was particularly brave. He lashed out in all directions, revealing his valour. And it ended with the earl's ranks falling back behind the fortress wall. Earl Röðbert also now sees where Jón rides with his large troop and recognises him clearly — he had the helmet Ægir on his head and the sword Sigurvandil in his hand — and he is pretty sure now that the town has been won. He calls out now with a booming voice that the men should flee into the fortress and defend their lives. It ended with him and his troop making it into the fortress in spite of tough opposition. The gates of the fortress were then locked behind them. Eiríkur had pressed such a fierce attack that some of the men of the fortress had retreated into the moats which had been excavated around the fortress, and had drowned in them.

They now pitch their war-tents on the level plains around the fortress. They attack the fortress for three days, but make no headway. Nor can any man come up with a way to take the fortress, be it with catapults or other war-machines. Jón then seeks the advice of his men on how the fortress should be taken, but nobody could provide a solution.

Jón then speaks: 'It is my advice that every man should take a bundle of wood from the forest, because that will not arouse suspicions among the men of the fortress, and take it to his tent. Half of our army shall do that, while the other half shall attack the fortress. They will think that it is our firewood. There are now only three nights until Earl Röðbert will have summoned all of the men of the land to this place, and then we will be outnumbered.'⁵²

The day passes and evening comes. The peace-shield was then raised. And when Jón's men had eaten and drunk, Eiríkur told them to put on their armour. Once they were convinced that the people of the fortress were asleep, they took out their bundles of wood and carry them to the moat. The army then crossed over this bridge. Jón now arrives at the gates of the fortress and hews the lock off with the sword, Sigurvandil. And while he does this, Eiríkur brings down the drawbridges, which had been constructed across the moat. The army then proceeded across. These bridges were down during the day, when men needed to ride across or transport other items to the fortress, but they were hoisted up in the evening, and then no being had access to the fortress. The men of the fortress thought that such precautions would suffice, as they had on the previous nights, and so most of those who had been posted as lookouts went to sleep.

The men had a rude awakening to find that Jón had arrived there with his entire army. He placed Rogerus and Rodgeir in the vanguard, in case the men of the fortress should arm themselves. And he and Eiríkur now went with one thousand men to the quarters where Earl Röðbert had recently been sleeping, because Jón had gotten hold of wise men, who had been with the earl a short time previously in the fortress, and were familiar with all his tricks and the layout of his rooms. They found a passageway and went down it until they came into the tower and proceeded without making a sound. The tower was fitted with spiralling wooden platforms inside, and they walked on until they came to a wooden ceiling. A trapdoor was fitted into it, and it had a strong lock. Jón broke it open, and there were the sleeping quarters of Earl

⁵² Again, there seems to be some confusion. When Jón and Eiríkur arrived there were apparently three nights until the reinforcements arrived. We have just been told that the fortress was attacked for three nights, which should mean that the reinforcements are now about to arrive. It may be that Jón's plan is supposed to have been devised in the meantime. In any case, the point is that there is a pressing need for a solution to be found.

Roðbert and his retainers. Jón ordered them all to be apprehended. He himself proceeded up the tower and into the upper part and went around all the sleeping chambers and could not find the earl. They then walked up to a room which had an iron door fixed into a marble wall, and it was locked also. Jón bashes the lock open and breaks the latches. The door then springs open. That chamber was completely draped in gold-embroidered woven fabrics. The earl was resting there and two lads beside him. Roðbert heard the crash when Jón smashed in the lock and woke from his sleep and grabbed his weapons. Immediately on entering the chamber, Jón and his men took hold of Earl Roðbert, because he did not have any sneaky escape plans, because he thought that none of his enemies would be able to get at him there. He did put up, however, a valiant defence, before he was apprehended, but it ended just as people say, that no one person can stand against the many.

[XXVI]⁵³

Now Eiríkur and Jón come down from the tower and have the earl, all tied up, with them as well as many other men. They came out into the streets, and there they found a large group of men from the fortress, because Rodgeir and Rogerus had arranged it thus with the men. And when they see Jón with the excellent helmet, Ægir, his size and beauty, and all the people serving him, and Roðbert tied up and defeated, as was fitting on account of his treachery, all the men of the fortress are won over to accepting Jón's authority, and many were very keen to do so, having previously served his father. And what Jón had achieved was considered to be quite something for a single night's work. The morning after he had everybody summoned to a huge assembly, and discusses there with his friends how Roðbert should meet his end, but an agreement could not be reached on that.

Jón then speaks: 'It is fitting that Roðbert should meet the same end that he dealt to Hringur and Eilífur as punishment for not killing me.'

They then had two fires made, and they tie Roðbert up in between them, and there he ended his life. Many people said that was a fitting end for him because of his treachery, and many people are of the opinion that there has never been a traitor equal to Roðbert. All the people from the whole country now submitted to Jón, including the army which had been intended to support Roðbert. Everybody was delighted with Jón, and people thought that he had been whisked out of the clutches of death, escaping from the many trials and mortal perils which he had found himself in and the many trials which he had been subjected to. Most men loved him dearly, especially those men who had served his father. And when it was thought that his power was perfectly assured, he discharges all of Eiríkur's troops, except for five ships, and gives marvellous gifts to all the chieftains in return for their support. On account of such things he became extremely popular, and all people wished him well.

On one occasion Jón comes to talk with Eiríkur and said that he wanted to travel across the sea to Greece and fulfill his promise to seek out the Holy Land. Eiríkur said that that was a good plan. They now had the journey prepared in most elegant style, both with ships and weapons, and Rodgeir and Rogerus would be in charge of the defence of the land in the meantime. They now head first to Miklagarður, because they thought it was the most opulent

⁵³ In this chapter, although Konráður and Roðbert, according to *Konráðs saga keisararsonar*, are childhood friends, it seems strange that Konráður would be angry on account of Roðbert's death considering all the betrayals that he was subjected to at Roðbert's hands. Perhaps the sworn brotherhood that united them prevents him from openly revelling in his enemy's downfall.

place to visit. King Konráður, son of Emperor Ríkarður, was there. The king welcomes them with joy and affection and sent them on their way with excellent gifts, because the emperor, his father, had written to him so that he would not be angry with them about the killing of Earl Röðbert, given the necessity that drove them to avenge the wrongs done to them.

[XXVII]

Now Jón and Eiríkur sail to the Land of the Saxons, and Jón captained the warship which he had built inside the mountain, and Eiríkur the other warship which he had had made, which was the greatest of treasures. Marsilia the beautiful accompanied them on the journey, and their convoy was exquisitely decked out. They came to land exactly where they would have chosen to. Konráður was at that time also in the Land of the Saxons, having come to have his son, Vilhjálmur, crowned as the emperor of the Land of the Saxons. And when the father and son came to know that there were ships moored there, they guess that some noble and renowned men must have arrived in the country and they go to meet them with peaceful and hospitable intent, inviting them again to their home for a sumptuous feast. Jón and his companions remained there until the consecration of the emperor took place. Then Jón and Eiríkur and Marsilia received baptism and the true faith, along with all of their men. And all men praised their good fortune. They recognised then that Jón and Eiríkur were from the most noble families. And after the feast they went to the kings and thanked them for their nobility with fine words and said that they intended to visit King Hlöðver, Eiríkur's paternal grandfather. And King Konráður and his son, the emperor, happily gave them leave and in addition excellent gifts and their friendship.

Then they sailed to France and met King Hlöðver. He welcomes Eiríkur, his kinsman, with pomp and distinction, and does likewise with all the others. The king and everyone else think that they are paragons among men, on account of their strength, wisdom, beauty and all their accomplishments. King Hlöðver was always organising jousts, throwing and swimming contests and other sports. Eiríkur always proved himself to be the best knight and excelled in all sports. Jón, however, could not contend against another man on account of his strength and manliness. He thus easily took the victory in all sports, throwing and swimming contests, tournaments and all the other pursuits which were customarily enjoyed there.

[XXVIII]

It is not mentioned how long they were there, but what is mentioned is that they were sent on their way with noble gifts and pomp. From there they sailed to Flanders. They were received most warmly there. Jón learned that King Philippus, his maternal grandfather, was dead, and his son had taken on the rule of the kingdom. But this young king had not heard news about Jón from the kingdom of Hólmgarður for a long time, and when Jón told him everything that had happened to him, and how it had ended, there was a joyful reunion between them. And he thought that Jón had providence on his side, given that he had been able to extricate himself from as grave and as many sufferings as he had been subjected to. They stayed there for the winter enjoying great hospitality. And when summer came they asked to return home and were sent on their way with many excellent gifts and great words of praise, and they part ways the best of friends.

They now set sail, and nothing is said of their journey before they arrive in the kingdom of Hólmgarður. Men now see their fleet approaching from the fortress, before they arrive at their anchorage. Nothing was draped with cloth other than fur and silk and gold-woven fabric, and all the warships were painted above the sea-line in a most tasteful way. And when the people of the country knew that the foster-brothers had arrived, they hurried to welcome them with all the worthiness and honour which they could muster. And when Jón had been home only a short while, he sends out a message to the whole kingdom that every man capable of riding a horse and able to take his drink shall come to meet him in a month's time. In addition he sends Rogerus and Rodgeir to the supreme king in Hólmgarður and asks for his daughter's hand in marriage for Jón. Time passes until the stipulated month, leading up to the assembly, has passed, and the appointed day arrives. Many common people and huge crowds come to the fortress, Kastella, in droves. And at the same time Jón's messengers return bearing the message that the foster-brothers should attend Jón's wedding with all their noble vassals in the capital city. And after receiving this news they go to the assembly, where Jón is made chieftain over all of that kingdom which his father had ruled. Once that was done Jón asked all the lords and chieftains and governors within the kingdom and all the common people to abide by Christian law and worship God. And at the foster-brothers' beseeching, everybody agreed to submit themselves to that faith and the rule of those laws, as Jón so desired it to be arranged, and thus the meeting was adjourned.

[XXIX]

Then Jón once more calls all the noble people of the kingdom to him and announces to them once again that he will attend his wedding, and invites all the nobles to accompany him. They then prepare for the journey, five hundred men strong, and all of them equipped with fine weapons and clothes and horses. They proceed without stopping until they come to the kingdom of Hólmgarður, where they are welcomed with all the honour and hospitality which it is conceivable to show in this world, since they receive an invitation from the supreme king and are taken to the most sumptuous hall which there was in the city, and so began an excellent feast. Jón then restates his proposal, and asks for the princess' hand in marriage, which was not difficult for him to attain, because all men can see what a paragon among men Jón is, and thus perceived and understood his magnanimity, him being all the wiser on account of his abundance of refined senses. Jón was then united in marriage with the princess accordingly as established by the laws and just process of the land. The feast was then extended, and Jón made toasts in response to his wedding to the princess with much honour and distinction. On the second day of the feast the king has people summoned to an assembly in the city, and at that meeting he gives a long and wise speech, thanks all his most loyal men, who had stood by him throughout his whole reign, and said that he was now bent over with age and had one daughter as his heir, who stood to inherit his legacy and wealth, and she was married to the man whom he knew to be most noble in that land, 'and so now I will give,' said the king, 'the kingdom to Jón, and he shall be called king, and I entreat one and all, the rich and the poor, to be loyal and faithful to him, subservient and good-willed, like brave lords to a true king.' The king ended his speech with everybody pledging their full allegiance to Jón. Kings and dukes, barons and earls, submitted to Jón and swore loyalty to him, and afterwards knights and nobles, and last all of the common people. And thus the assembly ended. But the

wedding feast continued for half a month, and once it was over King Jón gave excellent gifts to everybody as befitted their rank. King Jón then gave Rodgeir and Rogerus the earldom which he had inherited from his father, and Jón was now the supreme king over the entire kingdom of Hólmgarður and had many children with his queen, and all those who were descended from him became the most distinguished men. And as far as Eiríkur is concerned it can be told that he heads home to Gaul, sent on his way by King Jón with excellent treasures befitting of royalty, and when he arrives home his father, the king, and the queen are overjoyed. And a little later King Vilhjálmur dies. Eiríkur then takes over the rule of the kingdom, and all men said that he was the most fitting person to do so in those lands, both on account of his lineage and prowess and great authority. He and Marsilia had two sons, the one named Vilhjálmur after his father, and the other Svipdagur after the earl, who was her own and Jón's father. And thus we end the story of Jón, son of Svipdagur, and Eiríkur the Curious.